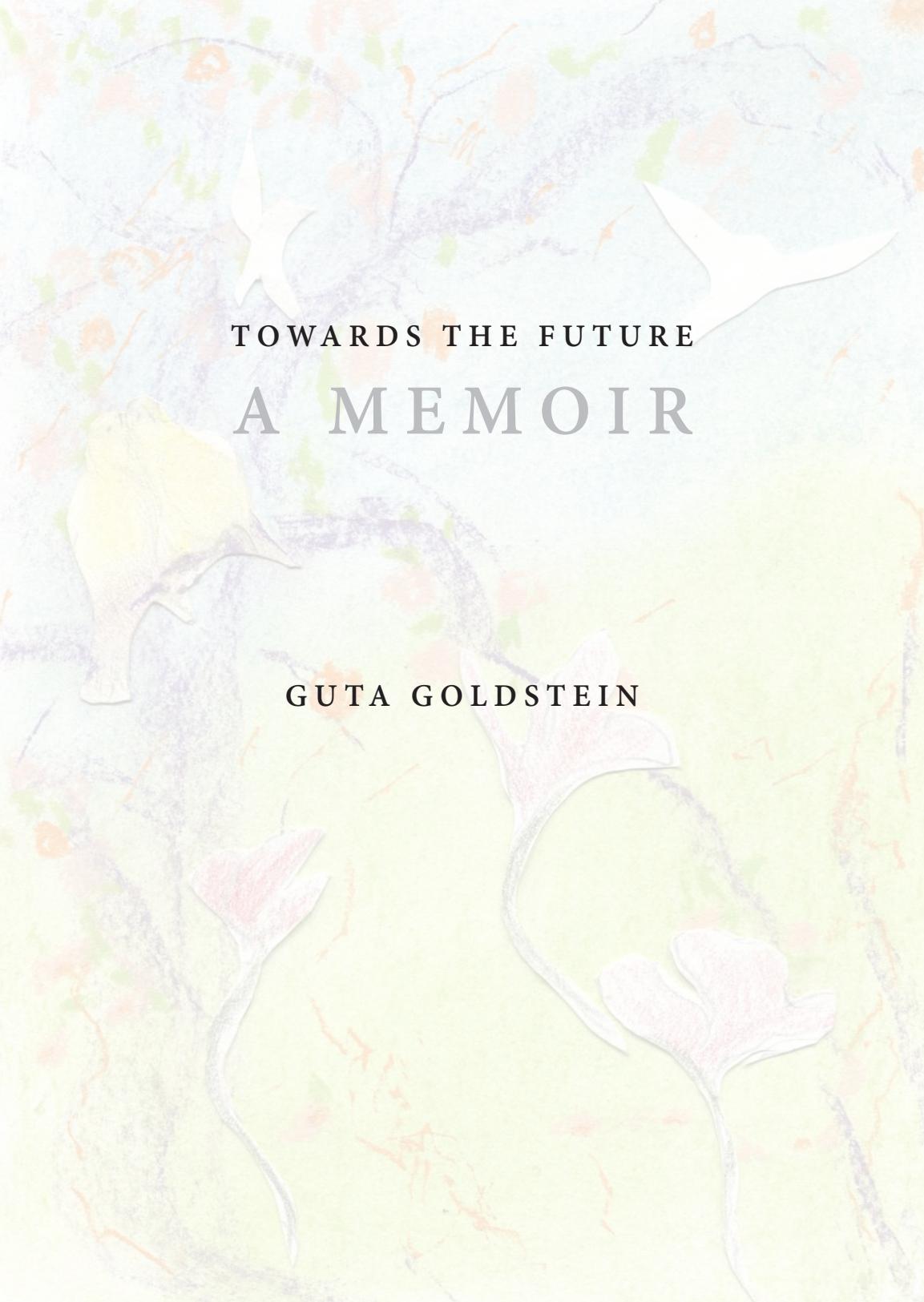


TOWARDS THE FUTURE
A MEMOIR



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GUTA GOLDSTEIN

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This memoir has been written for my family

My Children
Jessica, Michelle and Steven

My Grandchildren
Ronit and Idan, Nadav and Rachelli, Yardena,
Yael and Josh, Sefi, Benji and Tali

My Great-Grandchildren
Odelya and Noah

DEDICATION

I have been very lucky along my journey in life
to have encountered some very kind, caring
and supportive people.

Each act of kindness eased the way as I
embraced my new life after the terrible
war years.

I dedicate this memoir to all those
compassionate human beings who inhabit the
pages of this book.

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I AM FREE
PART ONE

1



Guta recently liberated, aged 15

LIBERATION: THE 16TH OF APRIL 1945 WAS A DAY LIKE NO OTHER!

On this day I was liberated by the American Armed Forces from a forced labour camp in Saxony, East Germany, together with 349 other young Jewish women aged between fifteen and thirty-something. We had been captives of the Germans, used as slave labourers, working twelve-hour shifts around the clock on starvation rations. We produced spare parts for German aircraft in a factory that had produced curtains before the war but had been confiscated and used to camouflage the German war effort. There were 200 of us from Poland and 150 from Hungary. In that camp I was the youngest survivor.

That morning we woke to find the SS guards gone. They had fled during the night. From outside our barrack, a loud noise could be heard. I ventured out and followed the shouting, wildly gesticulating crowd that was surging towards the edge of town. There I witnessed the triumphant arrival of the victorious American army, a slowly moving column of tanks followed by trucks and jeeps manned by gun- carrying, khaki-clad American soldiers who smiled and waved at the crowd. They advanced into the township of Meltheuer, bringing with them the long-awaited gift of freedom. We had endured six years of slavery, starvation and unspeakable horror and now – freedom!

Suddenly I felt myself running up the narrow hilly street towards my liberators! I don't know where my strength came from at that moment.

The feeling of elation that flooded over me was indescribable. It was a kind of madness, yet I was not mad. I was crazed with happiness, euphoric. I was floating, propelled by enormous buoyancy. There were no thoughts in my head. Instead, a song lodged in my brain. It was the first few bars of Dvo ák's '*Humoresque*', which I sang without making a sound and yet my heart thumped so loudly inside my chest that I felt it would break my ribs and jump out as if it too desired its freedom.

I ran until I reached the advancing column of tanks and then I ran alongside the convoy waving my arms frantically until we reached the centre of town. I stopped running as abruptly as I had begun. I watched for a while as the crowd surged towards the soldiers and then I walked back to the barrack and my prison bunk. There was nowhere else to go.

Inside the barrack the mood was subdued, sombre, contemplative. There was no outward rejoicing. No one was dancing or jumping up and down. People cried, thinking of their relatives who had not survived to witness this moment. The enormity of this event was too overwhelming. It had been so long in coming. We had lived through too much trauma and sorrow and it was difficult to grasp that our suffering had finally come to an end.

We were very fortunate to be liberated three weeks before the war's end. The German SS guards had left us without food when they fled and so on that first night of our long-awaited liberation I

went to sleep still suffering the pangs of acute hunger.

Next morning, as the Americans took charge, things began to change. Some American army officers arrived bringing with them the German camp commandant. They wanted us to corroborate his statement that he had saved us from the death march by disobeying an order that commanded him to evacuate us and march us towards Czechoslovakia, but no one understood what the Americans were saying. Luckily, there was one woman amongst us who understood English and she became our interpreter. The officers then conferred with the block elder and a few other women who signed a statement on behalf of us all confirming the commandant's assertion. Official business over, our main concern was still food and that was what the interpreter told the American officers.

Our liberators could not do enough for us and requisitioned truckloads of food, which began to arrive in quantities that we could never have dreamt about. I can't recall what I ate; it did not really matter to me then, as long as it was food. All I remember is that I did not stop eating. All through the day we were called to form a queue, as another truckload of food arrived.

It was a wonderful day. A soldier who drove by in a jeep handed me a small, khaki-coloured, wax-sealed, cardboard packet, which he took out of his glove box. It was difficult to open but I persevered and found that it contained a two-inch thick slab of chocolate. It was not easy to bite into it. I had forgotten the taste of chocolate and how delicious it was.

Sadly, that day was marred by death. A seventeen-year-old girl died of tuberculosis. She was one of only three girls among us who

had been lucky to still have a mother, who had fought so valiantly throughout those difficult times to keep her daughter alive with practically no food or medicine, only to lose her child on the day of liberation.

The following day I went outside the camp and saw many military trucks and jeeps parked one behind the other but no soldiers in sight. I remembered that the soldier who had given me his chocolate on the previous day had taken it out of the glove box so I decided to see if there was more. As I was trying to open the glove box, the owner of the jeep came back. I was so embarrassed and was ready to flee. He said something I did not understand, but he looked at me with such sadness and compassion when he saw the K/L *Konzentrations Lager* (concentration camp) painted in large red letters on the back of my dress. He opened the glove box and offered me his chocolate.

The three Klein sisters (Bluma, Genia and Lena), Edzia Kurz, Cesia Harcstark and my cousins Carmela, Inka and I left the barracks and appropriated the newly vacated SS women's dormitory on the first floor of the main building. The room had a large window facing the street, four double bunks, two on each wall, and a large rectangular table. We never cleared the table. We covered it permanently with the food that we received so everyone could access it and eat at any time. We spent the first few days of our freedom just eating and resting on our bunks. We had an unending feast, celebrating our liberation with food. During all the years of hunger and starvation we had day-dreamed about the food that we would eat at the war's end and we promised ourselves that there would be a feast every day and there would be a celebration every

day so that we could have a feast. Now that our table was laden, we did indeed feast. We had bread and jam and bread and cheese and just bread. I thought that I would never have enough of it.

A few days later someone somehow managed to get some potatoes. We had neither a pot nor facilities for cooking them. We had nothing but the potatoes. We were nevertheless determined to make a *cholent*, a Sabbath stew. It was decided that we would go to one of the pretty little houses in the village and ask to borrow a pot. Reluctantly, the *housefrau* (housewife) let us have the pot and she gave us permission to use her oven. We covered the pot with brown paper and tied it with string – courtesy of the curtain factory – so that the steam would not escape. We remembered seeing our mothers do this. We took the pot over the road to the *housefrau* and put it in the oven where it cooked overnight. When we picked it up at noon the next day, we thanked the woman for the use of her facilities, but she was indignant. She was insulted that we had not trusted her. She said that there was no need to put string around the pot. She would not have stolen the contents. Such an interpretation would never have occurred to any of us and we thought it very funny. We explained to her that there was no insult intended, that this was part of the recipe and that the reason for the wrapping of the pot was to keep the water from evaporating. Since she had never heard of a *cholent*, I doubt she was convinced.

The Americans were kind and caring. They looked after our welfare. They provided medical attention and the medication when needed. They even raided a German navy warehouse and confiscated a truckload of slacks, shirts and shoes to replace our old, ill-fitting camp rags and heavy wooden clogs. We each received a

pair of navy slacks, a blue shirt and a brand-new pair of shoes from this haul. I was too short for the slacks so I had to wear them rolled up. The shoes were a lovely reddish brown, new and shiny. I liked those shoes and I remember them very well because I wore them long after I grew out of them. I still have the corns on my toes that they caused. I don't blame the shoes for that, just my circumstances.

A week or so later we were taken from the barrack in Meltheuer and relocated to Rentzschnühle, a small hamlet several kilometres away where our resourceful liberators had requisitioned a hotel for us at a holiday resort situated amongst tall, majestic mountains. Coal-black, shiny cliff faces surrounded this small hamlet in the Erz Mountains where the river Elster flowed and they glistened starkly in the spring sun. It was a most picturesque part of Thuringia. The valley was green and peaceful, a little heaven on earth. There were no other houses in the vicinity, so it was a perfect haven to heal body and soul. It was what we all needed.

The Hotel Steinicht had enough rooms to accommodate all of us but a group of seven girls from Kraków and our group of eight chose to live in the vacant caretaker's cottage. It was a small, round building at the entrance to the hotel. It comprised two rooms that were accessible through a very small anteroom. An expanse of lush, green lawn separated it from the hotel building.

The lobby of the hotel led to an enormous room with large bay windows. I presume that it might have been the dining room but it was being used as the common room where there was a piano and three sewing machines that suddenly appeared one day. I felt quite accomplished when I taught myself to use the sewing machine and was able to sew a straight stitch.

A wooden outhouse near the side fence concealed a large, barrel-like tub filled with water heated by a wood fire. What a delight it was to immerse oneself in that tub. While we waited for our turn we chatted and luxuriated in our leisure. Gradually we began to feel and look like normal human beings again. I put on some weight; my cheeks filled out, and my hair began to grow and curl.

One day, without any warning, my legs began to hurt me terribly. I had difficulty in walking. I presume that it was malnutrition combined with the uncomfortable, too big and heavy wooden clogs that I had been forced to wear for years that caused it. The American army doctor who took care of my ailment spoke a little Polish and we communicated as best we could. He was a compassionate man. He bandaged my legs with leucoplast, from the instep to my knees. I wore the bandages for a week or so and when the time came to remove them, he warned me that it would be painful because the bandages had adhered to my skin. To take my mind off the pain he told me about America and how nice it was to live there. He said that when he returned home, he would send for me and he would adopt me. He was the first to make such a suggestion. The second person who claimed that she would have adopted me was Marianne, one of the SS guards who had been brought to Rentzschmühle by an American officer for identification. During her interrogation she asked for me, *Die kleine Gutka*, Little Gutka. She tried to defend herself by claiming that she had planned to adopt me at war's end. How confronting to be adopted by one's jailer!

In the ensuing weeks as Nazi prison camps disbanded and there were many scattered in the area, there began a pilgrimage, a

wandering of people from camp to camp in search of family. They hoped to find their mothers, fathers, spouses, siblings, children or any other relatives who might have survived. They stayed a day or two then continued on their sad missions. Most of them returned with their hopes shattered. Some of the young men remained in the vicinity. Friendships blossomed and romantic attachments were forged. They were lonely young adults. As more and more friends were dating and were busy with their lives, I found myself with no one to talk to, and as I was the youngest person there, I was left to my own resources.

I walked alone along the river among the pine trees enjoying the tranquility. I listened to the song of birds and the quiet rustling of trees overhead. But my favourite spot was on top of the mountain that I had discovered by following a path that led from the hotel. It was a beautiful, peaceful, green world. I liked the peace that surrounded me. I sat beneath a pine tree with my back supported by its trunk and sheltered by its generous branches, enjoying the solitude and the fragrant scent of the forest. As my hunger pangs abated and the euphoria of the previous weeks over liberty and freedom waned a little, a terrible sadness enveloped me. I had no desire to talk to anyone. I only came down for meals and to catch up with some of the news and the gossip of the camp's happenings, and then I returned to the mountains. I sat there till the next meal and thought a great deal. I pondered on my future, wondering what would become of me adrift in the country of my oppressors. I reflected on the past, and the enormity of the tragedy overwhelmed me. It descended upon me like a fog now that I was free. The realization that there was neither family nor home nor

country to return to was shattering. The future was difficult to fathom and the unanswered question of ‘why had I survived when others had not’ was tugging at my thoughts. It continues to do so, to this day.

Sometimes Lena, the youngest of the three Klein sisters, a quiet, serious girl with dark eyes and an olive complexion, came up the mountain with me. I did not mind her there. She was well mannered and polite. We talked about our interrupted schooling and the wasted years of our childhood. She told me about the terrible time when she and her older sister Genia escaped during a raid on the orphanage in Kalisz where they lived and how they spent a night crouched in a cornfield during a liquidation raid by the death squad. They had hidden among the corn hoping that the stalks were tall enough to protect them from the Germans who were pursuing them by spraying the cornfield with gunfire. Miraculously, they avoided getting killed, but they were caught later and sent to the Lodz Ghetto, where they found their sister Bluma, who had been deported earlier.

One day a young boy wandered into our midst at Rentzschmühle. He was Hungarian and the Hungarian women among us took him under their wing. They shared their food with him. The women, who had lost their own children, mothered him and generally looked after him. I am not quite sure how old he was. He may have been my age or possibly a year older. I was unaware of this boy’s presence among us as I spent most of my days in the forest on top of my mountain. As I emerged from my sanctuary one afternoon, I was approached by two Hungarian women who mentioned the boy to me. They said that he had seen me and liked me so much and that he wanted to meet me very much. I was quite shocked

by this revelation. The very last thing on my mind, if at all, was a meeting with a boy. Besides, I was painfully shy and in no mood for meeting strangers, let alone a boy. I flatly refused. I did not want to hear more about it but they persisted, appealing to my conscience by telling me that the boy was so unhappy that he had stopped eating. That was unheard of for a camp survivor unless they were seriously ill. By then some other girls had joined in the match-making spirit so I agreed to meet this boy, only for the sake of peace, and just this once.

We met the next morning. Watched by the women like mother hens, we walked off together. We were both extremely timid and did not know what to say to one another. We were not carefree children. We were so serious. Instinctively, we abstained from speaking of our recent past experiences, so we were silent. We were each absorbed in our own thoughts as we walked through a green meadow in the sunshine and in silence. I could not think of a thing to say and could not wait to get back. As we were returning from our walk, the boy stopped to pick one of the yellow flowers that dotted the meadow among the grass and silently and earnestly he offered it to me. It was a spontaneous and most touching gesture. I do not remember the boy's name or his face. It was a very short date and it would have been uneventful and long-forgotten but for his gift of the yellow flower that was given from the heart. I treasure the memory of this, my first date.

One Sunday morning Cesia, Carmela, Inka and I decided to visit our friend Herr Lehman, the doorman who had shared his lunch with Cesia and me during our incarceration leaving it in the waste paper basket for us whenever we were cleaning his sentry

booth. He had also left his address, which he had written for us on the back of a postcard. He lived in a small cottage in a township by the name of Kossengruen, a six-kilometre walk from the hotel in Renchmuhle. He was very happy to see us, but I was not so sure if his wife shared his sentiments. Although she was very polite, she seemed distant and suspicious. Nevertheless, we were made welcome and asked to stay for lunch. Frau Lehman made the most delicious potato dumplings served with gravy and meat. It was our first taste of meat for years. We chatted as we ate in their homely, spotless kitchen, their kitchen table laid with a pretty tablecloth and set with pretty, porcelain crockery. Frau Lehman did not contribute much to the conversation; neither did I for that matter. I just listened, as I was not very confident. I felt uncomfortable in the presence of Frau Lehman's stern countenance. Herr Lehman, on the other hand, was a very friendly, kind and warm-hearted human being.

He told us that they had two sons who were both away at the war. One of his sons was in the *Vehrmacht* (regular army). He said that he had not heard from him for some time and he was very anxious about his fate. I had the feeling that this was his favourite son and I sympathised with him. I also sensed his embarrassment when he spoke of his second son who was a member of the SS and was stationed somewhere outside of Germany. He said that he had been against his son joining the SS but that his son had ignored his objections and joined anyway. Frau Lehman did not make any comments. Her expression betrayed her displeasure. I felt that she did not want her husband discussing this with us.

After lunch we were asked if we would like to have an afternoon

nap and we gratefully accepted their kind offer. We were shown into a bedroom with two beds. Two framed photographs of young men in army uniform stood on each of the bedside tables. It was obviously their sons' bedroom. Dazzlingly white, starched linen covered the fluffy eiderdowns and pillows. The bedding was so inviting, resembling huge mounds of beaten eggwhite, so soft and light. I remember being surprised that people still lived normal lives and slept in beds like these while I had been sleeping on a hard, wooden bunk with a dark rag for a blanket and no pillow. What a sensation of pure joy it was to be able to lie down on clean, white sheets in a proper bed on soft pillows underneath a clean, white, fluffy eiderdown. It was the most comfortable sleep I'd had in years and the sensation of this white soft bed remains one of my cherished memories to this day.

As we had had no access to world news for many years, we had no way of knowing that the United States was at war with Japan or that President Franklin D. Roosevelt had died recently. It was during the presidency of Harry Truman that the war ended. I heard his name mentioned often in those days. To me his name will always be synonymous with the end of World War II.

The 8th of May 1945! World War II: the war had lasted six long years and had claimed millions of human lives, finally ended. In reality, there had been two parallel wars. One was fought by soldiers with guns and ammunition and involved governments, territories and occupation and was eventually won, thankfully, by the Allies. The other war was a one-sided, single-minded, cruel war that was waged against world Jewry in every city, town and village of every country in Europe under German occupation. A

war of annihilation was unleashed against unarmed Jewish men and women, young and old, little children and tiny babies. This was a war that had wiped out entire Jewish communities from the face of the earth without a trace. That war had also ended. World Jewry was left decimated and its remnants were orphaned, dispossessed, and homeless. Nothing would ever be the same.

An uncertain future awaited us. Nevertheless, I dared to hope that one day life would resume with some normality for us all. The whole world was celebrating this long-awaited historical event and so were we. With the help of some of the women, the American soldiers in charge of our welfare had organized a dance evening in the dining room of the Hotel Steinicht. They invited their army friends and we were all invited. Now that we all looked human again, it was apparent that there were many pretty young women among us. The room was ablaze with light from the chandeliers, which gave it an air of festivity. There was growing anticipation and excitement. Lively music filled the room. My feet were tapping to the rhythm of 'The Old Man with his Horn', a song that I will always associate with my liberation and that evening. There was a new dance that they called boogie-woogie, and everyone was learning it. I would have liked to dance so much but no one asked me. I was ignored. I was just too young to be noticed. Everyone was dancing and having a wonderful time except for me, but I did enjoy the music. All in all, it was a wonderful way of celebrating the end of World War II.

Part of the armistice agreement was the division of Germany into four zones: the American, the British, the French and the Russian. Rentzschm hle was in East Germany and it would become

part of the Russian zone. By the end of May the American army had to leave the area and move to West Germany. We were given the choice of staying or leaving for the West with the Americans. The time had come for our carefree interlude to end, as we knew it eventually would.

It was time to make our own decisions as we regained some control of our lives.

We were issued with an identity document because without it, we would be unable to move about freely. Some girls who still hoped to find family alive decided to stay and make their way back to Poland. Among them was our friend Lola from Krakow who, in the hope of saving her child's life during the occupation, had left her toddler with a non-Jewish family in Poland. The thought of seeing her little daughter had kept her alive. She was anxious to return to Poland as soon as possible to reclaim her child and hopefully find her husband alive. I hope that she did find them both but we later lost touch, and to this day our paths have never crossed. Cesia, who was still hoping that some of her brothers might have survived, chose to go to the Feldafink displaced persons' camp in West Germany to look for them there.

Inka, Carmela and I decided against returning to Poland. The only family we still had left was our grandmother and two aunts living in Jerusalem and that was where we wanted to go. Everyone was eager to leave Germany as soon as possible. We assumed that if any one of our family did survive, they too would get in touch with our relatives in Jerusalem. Rumour had it that Italy was the route to Palestine and that the Jewish Brigade, a unit of the British army, was stationed there and they would facilitate our endeavors to get

to Palestine. Our decision made, we bade our friends goodbye. Each one gave us an identical injunction: ‘Remember my name. If you should chance to meet anyone of my family, tell them that I am alive’.

We paid another visit to Herr Lehman to say goodbye to him and his wife and they wished us well and gave Inka the tablecloth that she admired so much when we had had lunch with them on our last visit.

Early the next morning as the sun was rising and a beautiful pink dawn appeared, the six of us climbed onto the back of a canvas-covered army truck. Without any possessions, without any money and only the clothes on our backs, we made ourselves comfortable on the bare floor of the truck. Inka, her new friend Hansi, Marian, Carmela, Cesia, and I were driven towards the future. Without a plan or direction, we somehow had to get to Italy and from Italy to Jerusalem.

We passed through townships and villages and saw the view backwards from the rear of the truck. It was a bumpy ride and far from comfortable but we were no strangers to discomfort. The driver arrived at his destination in the city of Augsburg, where he left us in the street somewhere in the middle of town. There was much traffic of military vehicles in the streets. No civilian traffic was to be seen. We hailed another army truck that took us as far as Hof, a city in Bavaria, situated in West Germany. We found lodgings with a young blonde German woman and her little daughter whose husband had not yet returned from the war. Our accommodation was arranged and paid for by the office of the *Bürgermeister* (Mayor) of the municipality. There was a

sudden influx into West German cities of ex-concentration camp inmates of many nationalities, as well as other forced labourers like Russians, Poles, Czechoslovakians, Hungarians and others from all over occupied Europe. Because the population explosion was the result of a situation created by the Germans themselves, it was now the duty of the *Bürgermeister* and the municipality of every town to render assistance to the refugees.

There was chaos everywhere. There were no services at all: no transport, no postal services. There were shortages of every kind. Food and clothing were hard to come by. As we had nothing but the clothes that we wore, Inka and I were given a voucher for a length of material and a voucher to a dressmaker in a nearby township. The dressmaker who sewed a dress for me said that she liked my name so much that she was going to name her daughter after me when she had one. It was strange the way they never acknowledged who we were. No one cared to ask how we got to be there or what had happened to us. They were all overly polite and ignored the immediate past as if it hadn't happened.

We all stayed in Hof for several days. Edzia, Ala and some others joined us en route to the DP camp and stayed a while. Everyone was looking for family and leaving their names behind in case someone should be looking for them. Lists were posted and checked daily. Everyone was anxious to contact relatives or friends anywhere in the world to advise them of their survival. Again, the American army came to the rescue offering to post mail through the American army's mail service. We availed ourselves of this offer. Luckily Inka remembered the address of our relatives and we were able to send a postcard to one of our aunts in Jerusalem.

Palestine was under the British Mandate at the time and their policy was to limit Jewish migration. Although our relatives would sponsor us, rumour had it that it would still be a very long wait until we got permission to go there.

My cousin Carmela was the only one who was eligible to go to Palestine through legal channels because she was in the lucky position of being a British subject. She was born in Haifa on Mount Carmel, hence her name. As a result of her parents' unfortunate decision to return to Poland before the war, she had found herself in the wrong place at the wrong time. Carmela decided to stay in Germany and arrange her return through the proper channels.

I spent a long, traumatic night trying to resolve a dilemma. I had a very serious decision to make concerning my future. Until then, all decisions regarding my life had been made for me either by my elders, by the Germans or by Fate. This time the decision was mine. I had to choose between my two closest relatives. Carmela wanted me to stay with her in Germany and Inka wanted me to go with her and Hansi to Italy. We spent a whole night in discussion. They each tried to influence my decision. Each was trying to persuade me in her favour. They both knew how to argue their point; each had valid points for me to ponder. It was dawn when I announced my decision to stay with Inka. It was a sad day, but we consoled ourselves that we all would soon meet again in Jerusalem. Inka, Hansi and I would have to try to get there with the help of the Jewish Brigade in Italy.

Next morning, we said our goodbyes and parted. Carmela, Cesia, Ala, Edzia and Marian left for the DP camp and we went in search of the Jewish Brigade. My status as decision-maker was

then rescinded and I reverted to child status where decisions were made for me. Inka made them because she was older.

Inka and Hansi arranged for us to join a transport with other Jewish people who were leaving for Italy. We travelled in a convoy of army trucks under the command of the Brigade. It was a long, uneventful journey. We stopped in the evening, somewhere at an army base. I remember a dance in the open air and again I sat and watched, tapping my feet to the rhythm of the music but never getting to dance a step.

The next day at dusk we arrived at Mittelwalde, an unbelievably enchanting place high up in the Austrian Alps. It was a wonderland of pine trees atop immensely tall, imposing mountains that were still covered in white, glistening snow. It was a spectacular vista that made the most profound impression on me. It was magical to a fifteen-year-old. I was discovering the world, its beauty and magnificence. We were shown into an enormous hall. A spectacular view of the scenery visited the room through very large windows. The entire floor space was covered with stretchers one next to the other on which we were to sleep that night.

There were many of us, mostly young, Jewish men and women survivors. We were asked to conduct ourselves quietly so as not to draw attention to our presence and were told that we would be leaving at dawn the next morning. Food was distributed, which we ate in the dark.

Early the following morning we left this beautiful place to travel by train over the Brenner Pass into Italy. We shared the train with Italian prisoners of war who were returning home. They were a happy lot. They wore colourful bandanas and sang

songs, the words of which I could not understand but they sang beautifully. The tunes were melodious and catchy. Sometime in the late afternoon, we arrived in the city of Bologna, where the train stopped. People were spilling out of the wagons to stretch and to see what was happening. Masses of people milled about the platform. Inka caught sight of someone she knew to be a distant relative but then she lost her again in the crowd and we never saw her again.

The war had only just come to an end and nothing was functioning properly. There seemed to be a problem with the train tracks. All kinds of rumours began to circulate among the crowd. It seemed that it would be a long wait at the station before the train would start again. It was a sunny afternoon and, as nothing much was happening and the train was going to be delayed for a while, we decided to go for a walk and see what Bologna was like. We met two men from Romania who did the same. We did not really go very far but when we returned to the station, the train had already left.

The sun was setting, and we were stranded in Bologna, a city we did not know in a country whose language we could neither speak nor understand. The city was in ruins. We did not know where we would spend the night and we were without money. In desperation, we decided to try our luck and simply knock at any door and hope that someone would put us up for the night. A woman in a floral dress and a friendly smile opened the door of the very first house at which we knocked. Without a word of Italian, we tried to make her understand our predicament. With us speaking in German, the two men who were stranded with us

speaking in Romanian, the owner of the house speaking Italian, but mostly with gesticulation by all of us, we managed to secure our lodgings for the night.

The woman showed us the damage her house had sustained in a bombing raid. In one of the rooms, half a wall was missing and there was rubble piled on the floor. She indicated that we would be welcome to stay but we would have to sleep on the floor. She was a kind and friendly lady and we were grateful for her generous hospitality and her trust. I was exhausted. I lay down on the floor and slept through the night.

When I awoke in the morning, the woman showed me where I could wash my face and kindly offered me a comb for my hair because I did not possess one. When my hair was combed, she looked at me and raised her palm in a gesture that I understood to mean ‘wait’. She left the room and soon returned carrying a round hand mirror that she handed to me and pointing to it said, *lo specchio, lo specchio*. To this day I associate *lo specchio*, the Italian word for mirror, with the friendly, caring lady who taught me my first Italian word. I am grateful to her for her kindness and for taking the time to teach me. As we took our leave and thanked her for her hospitality, she once again repeated *lo specchio* so that I would not forget it.

We spent an uneventful day in Bologna. Some parts of the city had been extensively bombed and were in ruins. In a piazza full of rubble, a man in a booth was selling a coloured treat that he called *giacciata*. It consisted of crushed ice that he scraped with a metal gadget from a block of ice and topped with coloured flavouring. I had never seen anything like it and I was fascinated. One of the

men from Romania bought a serve and he shared it. It looked much prettier than it tasted but it was refreshing on that hot day.

Every so often throughout the day, we returned to the station to enquire about a train to Rome, which was the destination of the train that we had missed. There were no timetables, no schedules and no regular train services. It was bedlam and throngs of people waited at the station for many hours and sometimes a whole day. Everyone was helpful and the atmosphere was friendly. At dusk we returned to the station and waited. As night was falling and there was still no train, I lay down on the bare concrete of the platform with my arm under my head to serve as a pillow and I went to sleep. Many people did the same. Trains were few but passenger trains were particularly scarce.

I awoke during the night and heard the sound of a train. As the train neared the station, I saw that it was a goods train with open wagons and, what is more, it was stopping. We had no idea about its destination but a sign in large, bold letters at the front of it read ‘Firenze’. None of us knew what or where Firenze was but since there had been no train all day and we did not want to spend another night on the platform in Bologna, we climbed on board. We decided that we would have to try and somehow make our way to Rome from Firenze. It was a warm summer night and the sky was full of glittering stars. The wagon was roomy so there was plenty of room to stretch our legs. I stretched out on the hard floor and went back to sleep, rocked by the motion of the train.

I woke to see the sun shining above me from an azure Italian sky. Soon afterwards the train stopped at the station in Firenze. It was still very early in the morning when we scrambled off the train

and onto the platform. We walked out of the station onto a very large, beautiful square with handsome buildings facing it on three sides. The square was paved. Horse-drawn hansom cabs were waiting in a row. Every horse wore a red plume on its forehead and the carriages had large colourful umbrellas that would protect the lucky passengers from the hot summer sun. Even the cab drivers wore brightly coloured uniforms and hats. How I wished to ride on one of those.

The name of the square was la Piazza di Stazione. It was a beautiful Saturday morning and I was in Italy, the warm country where the birds from Poland flew to every year before the harsh winter arrived. That one fact that I had learned at school in Grade One was all that I knew of Italy.

Since it happened to be a Saturday, we decided that the best thing to do would be to try and find a synagogue, and hopefully some vestige of a Jewish community where we could get our bearings and some advice about the best way to get to Rome.

The Romanian language, it seems, shares some similarities with Italian, or so I was told at the time. The two men, being Romanian, had volunteered to go in search of the synagogue. Inka went with them while Hansi and I waited for them in the piazza and minded our few meager possessions. There was no shade to shelter us from the hot midday sun and I was very hot and very hungry. Although we now possessed a change of clothing, we had no food and no money to buy any. Time passed. We stood there waiting for an eternity and there was no sign of them. Hansi was furious. Besides, we were worried about them. They were lost. We were glued to the spot in case they came back and would be unable to find us.

After nearly three hours of waiting, we eventually saw them walking towards us. There was another man with them in a suit and tie wearing glasses and a hat. He was in his late forties, slightly built and of medium height. He greeted us politely in German and introduced himself as Mr Goldenberg, the secretary of DELASEM (*Delegazione per l'Assistenza degli Emigranti Ebrei* / Delegation for the Assistance of Jewish Emigrants) and a refugee from Germany. He took charge immediately and, to my great delight, he hired one of those horse-drawn carriages that I had so enviously eyed all morning. He accompanied us to a Jewish community shelter in the Via della Marmora known as *l'Ospizio* (the hospice) under the auspices of DELASEM. We were introduced to a lady who showed us into an unfurnished room with some mattresses on a bare terra-cotta tiled floor. There was neither linen nor bedding. Mr Goldenberg apologized for the quality of the accommodation, but he explained that they were only just getting organized. We were apparently some of the very first survivors to arrive but they were expecting many more.

When the man left, Inka explained her long absence. She said that when they found the synagogue they stayed until the end of the service and afterwards they were invited for lunch, as it is customary to extend hospitality to visiting strangers and they were considered very special visitors.

I was annoyed that she enjoyed a sumptuous lunch while we were hungry and sweltering in the sun for hours, but I supposed that under the circumstances she could not have helped it. She told us that Firenze meant Florence and that was where we had landed. She also said that it would take quite a while before we

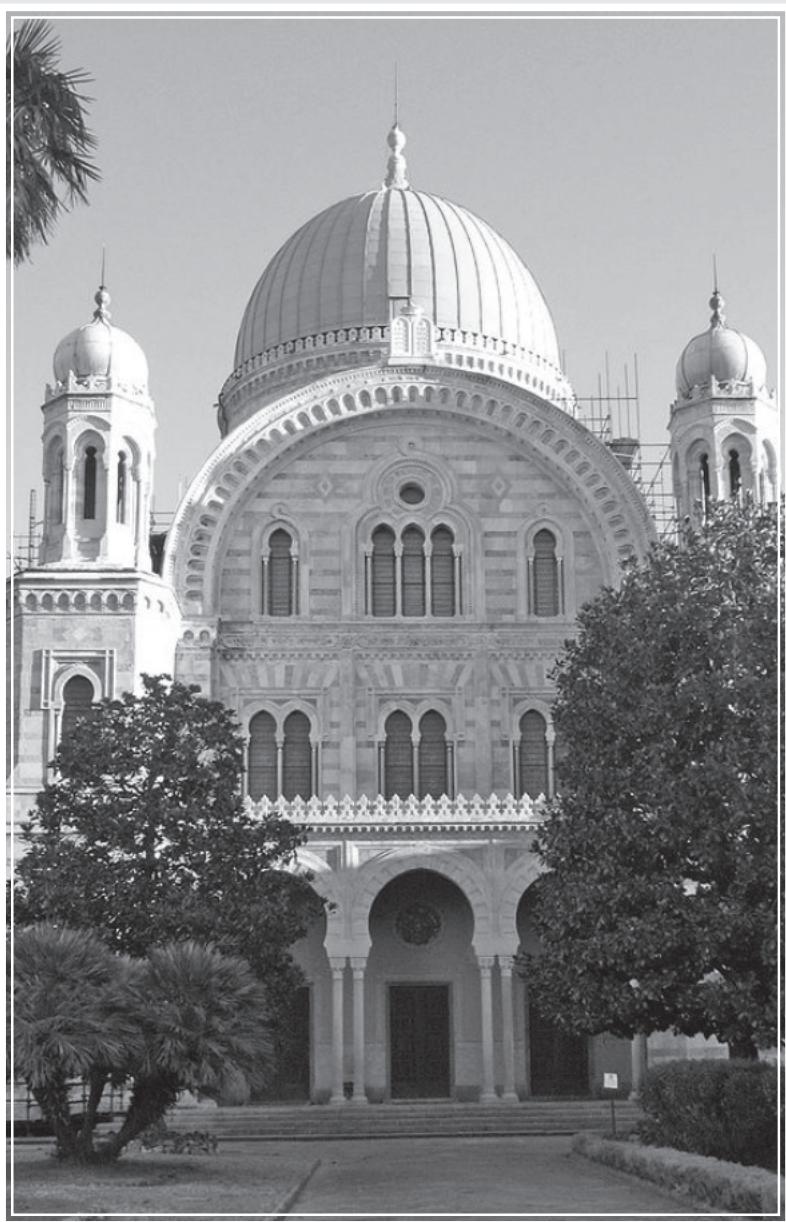
would be able to get to Jerusalem because there was a blockade. Mr Goldenberg advised us to stay in Florence as there were many survivors converging on Rome. We heeded his advice, remained in Florence and waited. Thus began my love affair with Florence, one of the loveliest of cities.



Florence

DISPLACED
PART TWO

2



The Synagogue

The synagogue in the Via Farina in Florence is an impressive edifice in the oriental style crowned with a green cupola in the center and two smaller cupolas on each side. It was built in the nineteenth century and stands inside a large courtyard enclosed by a wrought-iron fence that is worked in an oriental lace pattern.

In the days following the end of the war, a constant influx of destitute survivors just out of the camps began arriving in Italy from Germany. Responding to the need, the Italian Jewish community of Florence organised a soup kitchen in the courtyard at the front of the synagogue. Every day at noon trestle tables were erected, and a large cauldron of hot minestrone soup was brought and served to the refugees.

Soon, the purpose of the gathering in the front of the synagogue was not only to provide sustenance but also to provide much-needed social interaction. People gave each other helpful suggestions, caught up with news, but, most importantly, they searched each other's faces in the hope of recognising someone they had known: perhaps their lost parents, a loved sibling, a spouse or their own child. They would inquire of one another if by chance or by some miracle they may have come across any of their relatives or friends or whether they possibly knew of their fate. There was a deep longing for any scrap of news. Everyone was searching for lost family.

Pani (Miss) Fryda was one such person. She lived in Florence and was not in need of the midday soup but she came every day to inquire about the fate of her family. She was hoping that some of the survivors had possibly encountered her parents whom she had left in Poland when she came to study in Florence before the war.

She had come to study dentistry, because the admission of Jews to the universities in Poland had been restricted. The outbreak of the war prevented her from returning home. During the German occupation of Italy, she had been hidden in a convent, where she had survived the war.

She was a distinguished lady, tall with dark shiny hair parted in the middle and pulled back severely into a bun at the base of her head. When she smiled, she showed a row of beautiful white, straight teeth. *Pani Fryda* came every day at lunchtime to the Via Farini. She was kind and helpful and in the ensuing years she became a good friend of ours.

We met many people in those early days in Florence. Some came and went, and we never saw them again. There was one person whom we met only briefly. She stayed in Florence for a short time but her story made a lasting impression. She was a young Jewish woman from Poland. She had her little daughter with her but during the war, through connections she had managed to arrange for her little girl to be hidden in a convent to save her child from being murdered by the Germans. The mother had survived and when at war's end she came to pick up her child, the little girl did not recognize her and at first refused to go with her. It was a traumatic situation for both, a tragedy. In the ensuing years I heard many such stories from mothers who were lucky enough to save their children by leaving them with strangers and sadly they had become strangers to their own children. It was a heavy price to pay. Such stories added another dimension to the horrors of the war.

Years later, on the other side of the world, when my husband-to-be introduced me to his cousin Natalie (Natka) and the

conversation turned to my stay in Florence, she asked if I had come across a Mrs F who happened to be a friend of hers. By a strange coincidence it happened to be the lady with the little daughter whom we had met in Florence, and who now lived in the same city where I lived. Natalie told me that sadly the conflict between mother and daughter was still unresolved. Not until years later when the daughter married and had children of her own, did her relationship with her mother improve. These are some of the many, never-ending consequences of the Holocaust that ripple across the generations.

At that time, we met many people, some of whom befriended us, people like *Doktor* and *Frau* Dornfest, Viennese Jews who had fled from Austria after the *Anschluss* in 1938. They were on their way to Shanghai. Their luggage containing most of their possessions had been sent ahead. While in transit in Italy, Dr Dornfest suffered a severe stroke that resulted in complete paralysis. They were stranded in Florence, where they spent the war years hiding in two furnished, rented rooms. He was bedridden, and *Frau* Dornfest nursed and looked after her husband throughout the war. She was a courageous, spirited lady, good natured and ready to be of help to others despite her own sad circumstances.

Dr H, who originated from Austria and lived in Florence, also became our friend. He was a medical practitioner with a practice in the Piazza Signoria. He was a short, well-to-do man in his fifties with grey hair that stood upright on each side of his head. He always wore a white coat in his surgery and looked very much like the proverbial absent-minded professor.

It was summer. There was perfume in the air as we walked the

streets on our tour of discovery of this fascinating city and there were songs and music floating from open windows and balconies. We could neither speak the language nor understand it but we found the people charming and helpful. We were introduced to the concept of ‘siesta’, a time every afternoon when for two hours people slept or rested, and the city in effect shut down.

Then in the evening the city awoke and came to life. All the shops were open and brightly lit. The whole population of Florence came out for a stroll. The streets were crowded. People walked leisurely on the pavements and in the middle of the road. The atmosphere was that of a fair. People chatted and sang. There were several orchestras performing in the various piazzas in town. There were so many people that the crowd often carried us forward unwittingly. It was a time before cars displaced people on the roads. The only traffic visible was army jeeps. There were also many American and British soldiers who would often stop people and ask them for identification. The possession of an identity document was mandatory.

Most awe-inspiring to me were the elaborate window displays of the confectionery shops. Behind the large, well-lit, plate-glass windows was a fantastic array of chocolates and artistically sculptured fruit in a variety of multicoloured marzipan. How my mouth watered! How I wished that I could try one of those confections. Every evening, I stopped to look at the confectioners’ windows. They were my favourites. There was no way possible for me to buy even one little chocolate but I looked just the same.

One evening we walked near a market and discovered that just before closing time the stall keepers cut away the bruised or

decayed parts of the blood oranges and they would sell the good pieces very cheaply, so we bought some. They had bright red streaks through them. They were very sweet and juicy and tasted delicious. What a treat!

We only stayed at the *ospizio* for a short time. A large group of Jewish partisans who had fought alongside the Russians against the Germans during the war was expected to arrive from Ukraine. Many of them were married and some of the women were expecting babies. The secretary at DELASEM, advised us of this and suggested that if we could find alternative accommodation, DELASEM would provide us with the money to cover our rent and some basic food.

Inka and Hansi went in search of lodgings and found a room in a *pensione* not far from where we were staying. The Pensione Nardi was situated on the third floor of a three-storey building in the Via Venezia off the Via Caponi.

The Pensione Nardi was situated on a quiet, tree-lined street of Florence. We rang the doorbell at No. 2 Via Venezia marked Pensione Nardi. Large, heavy portals opened onto a stone-paved vestibule that revealed a wide stone staircase that we climbed to the third floor. We were met at the door by a short, smiling woman with shoulder-length black hair and small black eyes. She invited us into a large apartment that consisted of an entrance hall, several furnished rooms and a large, sunny dining room with a few tables, each covered with a white tablecloth on which stood a condiment container. The rooms were spacious and sunny. The proprietress of that establishment was *la Signorina* Isolina Nardi.

At the time I thought that she was quite old, but I was only



The Pensione Nardi in Via Venezia

fifteen and at that age, anyone over twenty-five seemed ancient. In retrospect, I would judge her to have been middle-aged. She was unmarried and the emphasis on her title of *Signorina* made that fact quite clear. She and her sister had inherited the *pensione* from their parents, but the sister had died and Isolina managed the *pensione* alone. Isolina showed us into a spacious room with two big windows that streamed with sunshine. A round table and four chairs stood in the middle of the room and against a wall near a window stood a marble-topped stand and on it a pretty porcelain basin with a pitcher of cold water. On the opposite wall was a large, dark, wooden wardrobe. A double bed on the wall across from the windows completed the furnishings. But I could

see there was no bed for me.

We had tried to communicate as best we could without any of us understanding what the other was saying. Isolina stood in the doorway of the room waving her hand at me with her palm outward and saying, ‘*Vieni, vieni*’, which I understood to mean, ‘Stop, go back’ so I stepped backward every time that Isolina waved her palm at me. She continued waving and repeating the word *vieni* as I stepped further and further back, confused and dangerously close to the window. She persisted and eventually Hansi said, ‘Try and move forward, maybe that is what she wants you to do.’ I ventured a few steps forward and Isolina was delighted, repeating ‘*Vieni, vieni*’ as I followed her out of the room, where she showed me a bed that I understood would be for me. That is how I learnt my second word in Italian. The reason for my confusion was that Isolina had turned her palm away from her body instead of turning her palm towards herself, but that is the way that they beckon to you in Italy. Clearly, I had a lot to learn.

There was no more difficulty with the rest of the sign language. We managed to understand that the single bed would be put against the wall parallel to the double bed. There was also a communal kitchen where large, shiny black cockroaches reigned after dark, and where every morning one could find Isolina in front of the stove, armed with a large straw fan encouraging tiny sparks into a fire that smelled of cat urine. Isolina was impatient and sometimes bad tempered yet she was kind.

An interesting assortment of people lived in this establishment. There was an old lady known as *la Signora Senegalia* who had come with her husband from Senegal to Italy on the way to

somewhere to escape the war. Unfortunately, the war and bad luck had caught up with them in Italy. The husband died and at war's end she found herself a homeless refugee, ill and bedridden, dependent on a total stranger's kindness, which was not always 'freely' given. She was an interesting and cultured person who had seen better times. She was sometimes irritable, but I suspect that she was frightened and did not want to show it. She was one of Isolina's oldest tenants. Isolina was kind to her and tended to her needs but not always with good grace.

Opposite our room lived a mysterious French lady, *la Signorina Franchese*, whose youth and beauty had long ago faded but who tried to restore them with too much rouge and mascara. The result made her look grotesque. She was quietly spoken and very friendly. Whenever we met in the hall, she would speak to me in French that unfortunately I could not understand. I spoke to her in German and we chattered nevertheless smiling at one another. She must have been a very lonely person because she cried often. Sadly, Isolina was not very respectful towards her. I somehow remember her as a tragic figure, like a character in a play and somewhat surreal.

Next to our room lived a tall, thin Englishman. I do not know whether he was English or whether they just called him *il Signor Inglese* because he spoke English. In fact he hardly spoke to anyone, keeping very much to himself. He often could be seen in the kitchen with a stack of thin, round beefsteaks, which he would fry in a small frying pan one at a time, and then stack one on top of another. I was fascinated by the total absorption that he displayed to this task. I also wondered whether he ate them all at once.

Everyone envied him his steaks and all were speculating where and how he had gotten hold of so much meat just for himself. Meat was a rare commodity post war and extremely expensive.

Il Signore Inglese collected newspapers. Isolina once showed them to me when he was out. He had them neatly stacked in bundles on the floor of his room. Apparently, there was every edition of a newspaper (I do not know which) from the first to the last day of World War II. It was rumoured that he was a journalist. Sometimes Isolina cooked a meal for him and when she did, she served him in the dining room. She was always very respectful toward *il Signore Inglese*.

And there was Talpa. Talpa was a cat, a rather large cat. She was sixteen years old. The cat and I were nearly the same age. Her fur was the colour of dark grey clouds. She had green eyes and her irises were like slits. Talpa was not a friendly cat. She stalked about with a superior air, the embodiment of selfishness and arrogance. She was furtive, lazy and spoilt. Talpa was Isolina's pet. There was nothing sacred where Talpa was concerned. She even used the wood and charcoal stove to relieve herself with unbelievable nonchalance, and any protest by the tenants to her mistress, who catered to her every whim, was usually dismissed in favour of Talpa. This was irrespective of the fact that some of us used the stove for cooking. I felt a profound dislike for that cat! Yet of all the cats I have encountered since, Talpa is the only one that I remember well. She was selfishness personified!

Isolina had her quarters behind a mysterious little door off the kitchen. Every morning after breakfast, Isolina went shopping for fresh meat for the cat. Such tidbits as calf's liver were considered

a great delicacy in Italy and therefore very expensive and difficult to come by immediately after the war. But nothing was ever too good for dear Talpa. She had her liver or meat freshly cooked every day. Isolina did not indulge herself in such luxury. She was hard-working. She cleaned and managed the *pensione* with no help from anyone. Her only entertainment was an outing on Sunday afternoon when her sister-in-law came to pick her up. Then both ladies went for a stroll in the park in their Sunday finery and hilarious hats, but not before dear Talpa had been given her Sunday lunch and, during the winter, was installed on top of Isolina's bed with a hot-water bottle.

Soon after my arrival in Florence I was introduced to Miss Julia Niemiera by our mutual friend *Pani* Fryda. Julia Niemiera was the honorary secretary of the organisation for Polish expatriates in Florence. She lived in a villa at Piazza d'Azeglio 9, the same villa where, at the beginning of last century, Polish writer and Nobel Prize laureate Stanislaw Raymont lived when he sojourned in Florence. Many expatriates frequented the villa in the Piazza d'Azeglio to read the Polish newspapers, borrow Polish books or just chat. She helped with advice and in some cases even with small amounts of money. Officers and soldiers of the Polish army, who served with the British forces in Italy during and immediately after the war and happened to be stationed in Florence at the time, also used to drop in to pick up mail or just to chat in their native language with this gracious lady. What I appreciated the most were the Polish books, which I borrowed from her library and greedily devoured.

Miss Julia was a distinguished lady, tall, slim, with a friendly

smile and a twinkle in her brown eyes. She appeared youthful and young at heart. Miss Julia had a pet turtle that lived in the courtyard garden of her villa. I was quite surprised when she celebrated her sixtieth birthday. To a fifteen-year-old girl, the age of sixty was ancient. I refused to believe it. Miss Julia did not seem that old to me at all, though her ninety-year-old autocratic mother, with whom she lived, certainly did!

Propped up in her chair, the elder Mrs Niemiera was placed at the head of a large wooden kitchen table. She seemed a part of it, an extension of it, as it were. A small figure dressed in black, her sparse, white hair was combed up into a small bun on the top of her head. But she had presence. Her expression was stern, unsmiling, as befitted a ninety-year-old autocrat, an aristocratic old lady of the Polish nobility in exile. This table was her domain. From this position she ruled the household. The table was scrubbed white every morning by the Italian maid Maria, who used a bristle brush. If anyone dared put keys, a book, or small change upon it, they were immediately subjected to a harangue in the sternest aristocratic voice:

‘Take that off the table immediately! Money is filthy. You never know in how many hands it has been held! Who knows how many germs it carries! Do you know that some children even put it in their mouths? We eat on it! Nothing that dirty should be put on the table to contaminate it!’ No one dared.

One day when Miss Julia was out, she found a tiny, yellow, fluffy chick stranded on the road. She picked up the frightened little bird and brought it home. She named it *Znajdek*, ‘foundling’ in Polish. The old lady was delighted. The little chicken immediately won



Piazza D'Azeglio 9, the house where Miss Julia lived

*Inset: The plaque commemorating the sojourn of
Stanislaw Reymont in that house.*

her heart. *Znajdek* was given the run of the table. This little yellow ball of fluff could do no wrong. It became the old lady's pet and companion. It ran all over the cleanly scrubbed table onto which nothing but food was allowed. In time, *Znajdek* grew from a little yellow powder-puff chick into an ordinary, scrawny, brown hen. She still had the run of the table, but now she flew on and off it at will. *Znajdek* ruled the old lady's heart while she reigned supreme at the head of the kitchen table.

Often *Pani Zofia Peruzzi*, Miss Julia's charming older sister, would come to visit from Rome where she lived with her husband and they would stay a while. I liked both of them. I became a frequent and welcome visitor to their home. In the subsequent years of my stay in Florence, Miss Julia became my very good friend and mentor. She was kind, understanding and took an interest in my education. She was concerned because I was not going to school. One day she suggested that in order not to waste any more time in my education while waiting for permission to immigrate to Palestine, I ought to learn English. She said, 'You could certainly not go wrong by learning English. Whatever part of the world you will end up in, language is an asset that you will be able to put to good use, either by teaching it or becoming a translator if necessary.' She immediately set about making enquires, soon recommended a teacher and wasted no time in arranging for weekly English lessons for me – as well as paying for them.

I was introduced to a charming, refined, grey-haired lady who spoke many languages. I was awed by her. She soon made me feel at home. We conversed in German. Her name was Mrs von Resetar, a widow who lived with her unmarried middle-aged daughter, Miss

Yelka von Resetar, who later also became my teacher. They were dispossessed nobility in exile from Yugoslavia and lived in a large apartment overlooking the river Arno at Via dei Fossi 1 near the Piazza Goldoni. Both ladies befriended me and took a personal interest in me and my learning. Once a week I travelled for my English lesson from the Via Venezia (and later from the villa on the hill near Galuzzo) to their apartment in the city. I thoroughly enjoyed the learning and looked forward to it. I remember that the very first English word I learnt was ‘handkerchief’ and thought it quite peculiar. We discussed its spelling. I learnt that there are no set rules in spelling and that I would have to feel my way into it as I learned the language. I learnt fast with the encouragement of Mrs von Resetar.

In the summer we had our lessons on the rooftop garden to which they had a key, and after the lesson Maria, their Italian maid, a sweet, grey-haired lady in long grey skirts, would bring up coffee and pastries greeting me warmly with *Buongiorno Signorina*. As I made progress, Mrs von Resetar thought that my understanding of the language was good enough, and she began acquainting me with some English literature. She told me about Stratford upon Avon, about Shakespeare, his plays and the Globe Theatre that he established. Eventually she began to lend me books in English from her extensive library. I recall the thrill at discovering the mysteries of Edgar Wallace’s writing, *The Crimson Circle* and *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, and the many romances published by the Yellow Books Press, one of which was titled *The Bachelor Husband*. Later I advanced to Louisa May Alcott’s *Little Women* and *Other People’s Children* by the same author. What an enjoyable book that was

and very funny. Later still, I read *The Picture of Dorian Grey* and others. I was an avid reader and read any books that were available, regardless of the topic. I read not only in English but also books in Polish lent to me by Miss Julia and books in German, which were lent to me by other people.

Mrs von Resertar died tragically in the street of a sudden stroke. What a terribly sad loss. After her mother, my gentle teacher, died, Miss Yelka von Resetar found time to teach me, although she had a busy life. She worked for the British Institute in Florence and was a clever, intelligent and a highly educated person. She had presence. Miss von Resetar taught me for quite a long time afterwards. She was an encouraging, interesting teacher. She continued to lend me books from their library which I enjoyed reading and of course reading them improved my English.

As well as being my teachers, both ladies were interested in how I was managing, and they cared about my welfare, which was heartwarming. I remember both my teachers with affection and gratitude.



Settled in our pleasant sunny room at the Pensione Nardi, we waited for news from our family in Jerusalem. While we waited, we made the best of what was on offer. I treasured and enjoyed my precious freedom. Every new experience was a treat. I was enchanted with the Italian people, their happy disposition and their friendliness. I admired the beautiful city of Florence, discovering her sights and treasures on our daily walks.

By some strange chance, I found an atlas of the world inside the table drawer in our room at the *pensione*, probably left there by a previous tenant. It was a great find! I looked through it every day and gradually memorised the capital cities and rivers of the various countries of Europe. It was an interesting, as well as a useful pastime. I also enjoyed doing crossword puzzles in German because that was the only available newspaper in a language that I could read at the time. Another pastime that I indulged in and which delighted me greatly was riding on the tram. For the price of two *lire*, I would spend a whole morning sitting in the tram looking out of the window, admiring the sights while the tram continuously circled the centre of the city. It was an entertaining way to become acquainted with my new surroundings. I spent a most enjoyable morning passing Via Cavour with its elegant shops, the Piazza del Duomo with its magnificent cathedral, the *campanile*, and the *batissero*, as well as the many churches and *palazzos* that make Florence unique. There were two trams, one that circled to the right and one to the left, *La Circolare Destra* and *La Circolare Sinistra* and I availed myself of both.

Not far from where I lived in Via Venezia was the church of the *Santissima Annunciata* situated in the *Piazza* that bore its name. Every Sunday morning, large groups of girls dressed in white, flocked to the church for the celebration of their communion. I was fascinated by the masses of miniature brides in exquisite white dresses of silk and lace with gossamer veils and flowers in their hair looking so graceful and so grand. I often went to the *piazza* to watch the procession and admire them.

But our existence was far from carefree and our future

uncertain. I often still suffered hunger. Every week Hansi went to DELASEM to collect our weekly living allowance, but most of it was spent on rent and not much was left over for food. Food was still rationed at that time in Italy; particularly, bread, pasta, flour and sugar were available only with coupons. We were newly arrived refugees and we did not have any coupons as yet. Our only option was to buy these food items on the black market and that was extremely expensive. We could ill afford it on the allowance that we were given. It was very difficult.

Sometimes we got a little help from someone we knew only as the *chayal*. He was a soldier of the Jewish Brigade attached to the British liberating forces in Italy. It seemed that he had some discretionary funds at his disposal for survivors. One day in autumn we were destitute and desperate. We had no money at all with which to buy food. DELASEM was closed that day and we could not find the *chayal* anywhere. It occurred to Inka that it must be *Yom Kippur*, The Day of Atonement, so she suggested that we fast as is customary on *Yom Kippur*, seeing that we had no food anyway. We fasted. Next day we took the length of dress material that we were given in Germany to be made into a dress and we sold it in the market. We bought food with the money and carried our food parcels home, longing to finally satisfy our hunger. To our surprise, we met the *chayal* coming towards us. He said, ‘What are you doing with all that food? It is *Yom Kippur* today!’ How terribly embarrassed we were! We told him that we had fasted the day before. I am not sure that he believed us but I think that G-d did.

Our situation improved slightly with the inception of the UNRRA (United Nations Refugee Relief Agency), an organization

established by the United Nations soon after the war's end. We each received 10,000 Italian lire, the equivalent of approximately USD \$17.00 a month, as well as a monthly ration of food products. Among them were tins of delicious-tasting, sweetened, condensed milk, and the unsweetened kind, as well as sugar and some assorted tin foods.

In my capacity as family shopper, I learned the art of shopping in Italy. I had my first experience of haggling without really trying. I had fifty *lire* to spend on a cabbage. I went to the market and soon found one that I wanted. I asked the vendor for the price. As I only had fifty *lire* and his price was one hundred, I thanked him and walked away intending to buy a cabbage that I could afford from somewhere else. I only went a few steps when the man called *Signorina* and offered to sell me the cabbage for eighty lire. I told him that I only had a certain amount but as I took a step forward, he reduced the price again. This procedure of me trying to go away and him reducing the price was repeated many more times until I said that I did not want this cabbage any more. As I kept walking he called *Signorina, Signorina* come back! Finally, cabbage in hand, he came running up to me and sold it to me for fifty *lire* after all. I was furious. The transaction that ought to have taken two minutes took the best part of twenty. The funniest part was that had I had one hundred *lire*, I would have paid him what he asked, paying twice as much and I would not have been any the wiser.

Not far from the Piazza del Duomo there was a small bakery that sold bread without coupons. The very first time I was sent there to shop, I learned another new word in Italian, but I came home without the bread. The shop was full of people but there was

no bread on the shelves. It was just a few minutes before noon. I asked the baker behind the counter for *pane*, the Italian word for bread that I already knew, but I did not understand him when he answered ‘*mezzogiorno*’. I felt embarrassed but I repeated my wish to buy some bread. His answer was the same: *mezzogiorno*. Eventually, he realized that I did not understand him, so he tried to explain to me by making the sign of cutting his arm in half, saying ‘*mezzo, mezzo, giorno*’, to make me understand that it meant half a day. Very disappointed, I came home without the bread and told Inka and Hansi that the bread would be available in the bakery in half a day. At six o’clock that evening when I presented myself at the bakery to finally buy the bread that I had waited for impatiently all that day, the baker was most surprised and told me that there was no bread then, that bread was sold only *a mezzogiorno*. I learnt the hard way that *mezzogiorno* meant midday. We had no bread that day, and not having any other food, we bought a little cake each, which was all the food that we ate that day. Indeed, I was learning something daily.

A large crowd was gathering in front of a shop one day as Inka and I were walking along a narrow street in Florence. As I came closer and asked what was happening, I was told that inside the shop they were selling the monthly pasta ration. We always carried our ration coupons with us just in case of such an eventuality. A monthly ration of pasta was a lot of pasta and there was a large variety to choose from. There were *rigatoni* and *tagliatelle* and *pastine* and of course *spaghetti*, to name just a few. Each type, after it was weighed, was wrapped in brown paper, which was then twisted expertly into a parcel. Inka and I chose quite a few varieties.

We had many parcels to carry home, but we had no shopping bag. By some strange coincidence, we had a white sheet with us. I have no recollection of the reason. The sheet proved useful as we spread it out and put all our pasta parcels into it and wrapped them all into a large bundle. I carried this white bundle onto the tram, which was full of people and not a spare seat to be had. As I was only a teenager, I was quite surprised when several people simultaneously offered me a seat. I had a good laugh when it dawned on me later that my bundle of pastas wrapped in the white sheet was mistaken for a baby.

Hansi had a flare for cooking so he was our chief cook. Inka and I were the helpers. My job was that of messenger, while Inka's function was mainly that of chief adviser. We ate simply: mainly potatoes, cabbage and, less often, spaghetti. Sometimes we would buy offal because it was cheap and Hansi managed to concoct a tasty, sweet-and-sour stew in Isolina's kitchen.

We tried to bake some almond macaroons one day, after we had bought some almonds at the market. We borrowed a meat mincer from Isolina, which we screwed on to the table top in our room. We put the almonds into the mincer and turned the handle expecting small pieces of almond to fall from it into the dish that we had placed there for that purpose. Instead of grated almonds, however, the mincer was oozing oil. There was oil on the floor; our hands were covered in almond oil, but there were no almonds to make macaroons! By the end we had produced a lot of almond oil, an insignificant amount of almond paste, an enormous mess, but no macaroons. We laughed a lot while cleaning up the mess hoping that Isolina would not be any the wiser. From that experience we learnt that almonds for baking must be grated not minced.



We waited impatiently for the postman every day, hoping for mail from our family in Jerusalem. The postman would ring the bell and from the vestibule he called, '*Postino, Postino*'. He never walked up the stairs. The residents all had a basket with string attached to the handle, and from each floor, they sent the basket down the stairwell. The postman put the mail into it and the basket was then pulled up. That way no one exerted themselves running up and down the stairs and the postman was not kept waiting.

There was no word from Jerusalem. Inka said they would most probably come to Italy to pick us up by aeroplane. I believed everything that she said in those days and every time I heard a plane overhead my heart skipped a beat hoping that my relatives had arrived. Eventually, we did receive a letter from our aunt Chana saying they were doing all they could to get permission for us to come to Palestine, but that these things would take time. In the meantime, she asked us to please send our photographs needed for submission to the British authorities there.

My greatest wish had been that as soon as the war ended, I would be able to continue my education, but I was in Italy with no language, no home and no money to support myself and so my schooling was postponed yet again. I attended a class that was organised by the Italian Jewish community where I was taught some Hebrew, but the class did not last very long because of a lack of teachers.

I always thought that when I grew up I would be a nurse because

I liked the uniforms that they wore, the white veil in particular. Or perhaps a kindergarten teacher because I always liked little children, so I was quite pleased when I was offered a job minding a toddler, A little girl by the name of Eva. She was a redhead with many freckles on her face. She was a sweet, eighteen-month old child. Her mother was Hungarian, her father was Italian, and they lived in a pretty villa in a nice residential part of Florence. They had a maid who cooked and cleaned for them; a middle-aged, Hungarian cousin of the *Signora* also lived with them.

The cousin was a very quiet, unobtrusive woman who went out of her way to please her well-to-do cousin. It was quite evident that she was there on her cousin's sufferance and dependent on her charity. The *Signora* was condescending toward her and sometimes even unpleasant. The two women conversed with each other in Hungarian but with her husband, her child and the maid, the *Signora* spoke in Italian. As my Italian was still very poor, the *Signora* and I conversed in German. A petite woman with a shock of light brown hair, she was pleasant and polite towards me. She proved tactless and insensitive, however, when we spoke about family and I told her that I had lost my entire family during the war. She remarked flippantly, 'Family is actually unnecessary ballast.' I was wounded by her callous reply.

I arrived at her house in the morning and left in the late afternoon. My job was to look after little Eva, to play with her, to feed and dress her and generally be her minder. For that I received a cooked lunch at midday and the privilege of eating it with the family at the table in the dining room. The meal was served by the Italian maid, who ate her meal alone in the kitchen after we had

finished. I liked little Eva and enjoyed playing with her. Gradually, other duties were added to my routine, including the washing of Eva's clothes, but when I was told to wash her soiled nappies every day, which I had to wash by hand, I politely relinquished my job.



There was much unemployment in Italy at that time and much poverty. We met Louisa Zatti, a young dressmaker who worked at home. She lived with her parents and her married brother and his wife in a two-roomed dwelling in Rovezano, a township on the periphery of Florence. They used the front room as the *salotto* (living room) and work room during the day and converted it to a bedroom at night. Her father and brother were unemployed. Louisa and her sister -n-law were the family's providers sewing and embroidering clothes. She made a beautiful white blouse for me, exquisitely embroidered with butterflies and bees, all for the price of a few tins of food. She preferred the food to money.

I needed shoes badly when the ones that the Americans had given me after Liberation became too small and my feet ached. When Hansi was given two long, white men's nightgowns from DELASEM, ridiculous items of clothing, we sold them on the market and used the money to buy a brand-new pair of comfortable shoes of my own choosing. They were a brown pair of golf shoes with a frilled flap over the top of the laces.

Although we were in dire need, we managed to enjoy life such as it was.

One of our favourite walks was along the Viale dei Colli. This

hilly, tree-lined avenue snaked and coiled past Poggio Imperiale and came to an end on top of the hill at the Piazzale Michelangelo. Here our eyes feasted on the magnificent panorama of Florence. Half way up the Viale dei Colli was a roller-skating rink enclosed by a wire fence. On Sunday afternoons during the summer, we would stop and watch young people dancing on roller skates to wonderful sounds of popular music. It was a treat to watch and listen. They danced and moved with such grace. I must admit that I was quite envious of those young people on the other side of that fence, while I just stood outside looking in. How I loved to dance! I spent many a Sunday afternoon watching and admiring the dancing skaters, humming and enjoying the music.

A huge black and white poster of Tarzan advertising the film of the same name with Johnny Weissmuhler in the leading role, caught Hansi's attention and he suggested that we go to see it. It was the very first film I went to see after the war and the third one in my life. What a thrill it was! But we did not indulge in such luxuries very often.

We had great fun one summer evening when, through the open window, a bat with wings outstretched flew into our room. Inka and I squealed with fright and ran about chasing this unwanted visitor out of the room. This made it flap its wings even more vigorously and menacingly while Hansi climbed onto the table wearing a hat and wielding a broom, which he flung in all directions. He looked hilarious. Indeed, we all looked so comical that we could not stop laughing all evening.

One day a Polish Lieutenant who served with the British army came to call on us. He came at the behest of our relatives from

Jerusalem and brought us some money that they had sent with him. It was the sum of 3000 *lira*. We decided to treat ourselves to some fruit. Each of us chose to buy the fruit that we liked best. Inka and Hansi were expecting a baby and she craved apples! Hansi chose grapes; Inka got her apples and I chose fresh figs. We feasted on the fruit.

A few days later, the Polish lieutenant came again and brought us a food parcel. I can't recall all the things that were in it but I do remember the tin of Ovaltine that tasted somewhat like chocolate and that I ate by the spoonful. There was also some bacon that made me think that the parcel was from him personally, which was very kind. I am quite positive that none of our family would have sent us bacon. I ate a piece of it raw and could not digest it. I felt quite ill that night. Another lesson learnt: don't eat raw bacon.



Italy is a country where *amore* reigns supreme and one couldn't help but notice couples strolling with their arms around each other, holding hands. One could feel romance in the air. I was suddenly preoccupied with the question of how or when I would know that I had fallen in love. I had no friends as yet with whom to discuss such an important matter. I could only ask Inka but when I did, she gave me a most unsatisfactory answer: 'When it happens, you will know.'

I found the Italian people kind and always ready to help with advice and a smile. They were particularly understanding and helpful if one did not speak their language. I had experienced it first

hand when I was sent to buy some parsley and did not know what it was called. I could not point at it because there wasn't any on display. The young woman who served me asked what I needed. In my very limited Italian, I tried to describe the item that I wanted. I told her that it was green and used in soup. She picked up every green vegetable in sight. I shook my head. After she had exhausted all her resources, she told me to wait. She disappeared for a few seconds, reappearing with an older woman who showed me some more green vegetables. She in turn came back with a man who also tried patiently to guess what it was that I wanted and, finally, the last member of the family emerged. He was an old man, probably the grandfather. When I described once again what it was that I wanted, the old man went to the back of the shop and came out waving a bunch of parsley. When I nodded and said 'Si' the whole family cheered and smiled, happy to have found what I had come to buy. Before I left, each in turn tried to teach me the Italian word for parsley; they handed me a scrap of paper with *prezzemolo* written on it. I was deeply touched by their efforts.



It was a time of discovery not only for me but also for the world at large. Penicillin, the miracle drug, had only just recently been discovered. Inka and Hansi had befriended a Jewish couple from Hungary by the name of Ronai. I can't recall the woman's first name but the man's name was Anton, which I, for some unknown reason, found hilarious. After giving birth to a baby boy, his wife developed serious complications and was very ill. Her temperature

was too high, and an infection had set in. The doctor did not hold out much hope for her recovery. He mentioned, however, that he had heard of a new miracle drug that was available only to the American army. The doctor was so much in awe of this medicine that he whispered its name and wrote it down on a piece of paper. If someone could somehow get it, she might have a chance to live. Anton was distraught so Inka and Hansi went out to see what they could do. It was quite late in the evening. They were gone for a long time but when they came back they were in possession of the life-saving medicine. They had to get special permission from some government official signed and stamped but they got it and gave it to the doctor, who immediately injected the woman with the drug called Penicillin. It was only available in ampoules, and when injected was very painful because the substance was quite thick. When the woman cried out in pain I decided that I no longer wanted to become a nurse.

It was a wonder drug. The woman recovered completely and quickly. Penicillin, and Inka and Hansi's quick thinking and energetic action, saved Mrs Ronai's life. A short time later, the family immigrated to Brazil where they had relatives. We never heard from them again.



The *Ospedale degli Innocenti* (Hospital of the Innocents) in the Piazza della Santissima Annunziata is a fifteenth-century building of Renaissance architecture by Fillipo Bruneleschi, with an impressive portico decorated in blue enameled terracotta



Ospedale degli innocenti where Giselle was born 1946

medallions. In this hospital on a sunny, spring morning on 2 March 1946, Inka gave birth to a beautiful blue-eyed baby girl! It was exactly one week before my sixteenth birthday. I could not have wished for a nicer birthday present – my very own, live baby doll. I was thrilled! I was bursting with joy! I was beside myself with happiness. I ran through the streets of Florence as if possessed. I was exploding with the most wonderful news that I had to impart but there was no one with whom I could share my joy. There was no one who would share my excitement. I could barely contain myself from shouting it out loud to every passer-by, but they were strangers and would not have been the least bit interested.

I just had to tell someone! I decided to run to Miss Julia to tell her my fabulous news. She congratulated me, but she did not share my enthusiasm. On the contrary, being a practical and logical person and concerned for our future, she lectured me on the impracticality and irresponsibility of people having babies at a time when their future was still so uncertain. I felt deflated and very disappointed that she did not share in my excitement regarding this miraculous event.

I can see her point now but at that time, I was not quite sixteen years old and she was nearly sixty. After just surviving so much death and destruction, a live baby was such a miracle. It took another fifteen years for the birth control pill to be available to women. In the meantime, there was a baby boom.

Although the hospital building is now an impressive national treasure of the city of Florence, in those days the interior was shabby and in need of repair. Inka shared an enormous ward with many women. I visited her and the baby at least twice a day and befriended some of the nurses, as well as other mothers. I admired their babies and ran errands for them buying baby powder, cotton wool, lanoline ointment and other baby needs that the hospital did not supply. I was very willing to do this as it gave me a pretext to visit the baby again and again.

I could not wait for Inka to bring the baby home. And when she did, I continued to visit the hospital every day to chat to the nurses about this wonderful baby and report on her progress. I was quite convinced that she was the loveliest baby in the world and presumed that the nurses thought so too.

Her parents chose the name Giselle and I suggested Aviva for her second name. Although my knowledge of Hebrew was quite limited, I knew that *aviv* meant spring and as she was born in spring and we hoped eventually to live in Jerusalem, it seemed appropriate. So she was named Giselle Aviva.

At first Isolina was not very happy about a baby coming to live in her boarding house but she soon grew to like the idea. In the end, she even fussed over her. Inka was very nervous when she first brought the baby home, so Hansi and I bathed her. Giselle was so tiny that Hansi was able to hold her in the palm of his hand while I sponged her. We bathed her in the porcelain washing basin which we placed on the table. Her mother was a nervous wreck and the poor baby must have also felt somewhat insecure. Her tiny little hand grabbed hold of her father's hair, which fell over his forehead as he bent his head towards her and she held it tightly in her little fist. We learnt to swaddle her in long white bandages from her armpits down to her ankles, as was the custom in Italy. It was supposed to keep the baby's spine straight. The poor baby could not move at all! She looked like an Egyptian mummy, but she did not seem to mind.

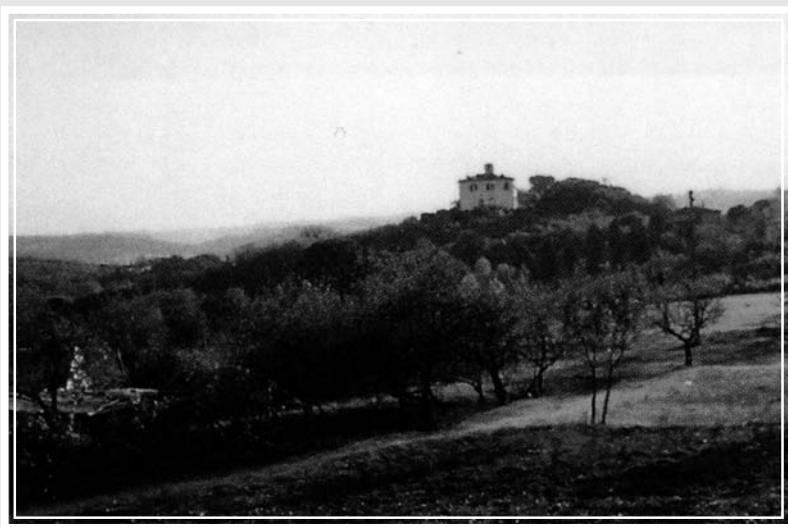
We owned two pairs of large, white cotton socks that we had received from the UNRRA (United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration). We unraveled them and with the yarn from the socks, a woman whom we knew knitted three most adorable baby jackets and she even embroidered little coloured flowers on the front of them. Giselle was a well-dressed baby.

Giselle slept in a pram in the space between her parent's bed and mine. She really was a good baby and only cried when she

was hungry. Once when her parents left her with me and they were a little late coming back to feed her, she screamed at the top of her lungs. I did not know how to pacify her. I was beside myself with worry. I nearly cried myself. Giselle grew into a lovely, chubby baby girl with beautiful blue eyes, blonde hair and a sweet smile. I adored her.

Giselle was six months old when we had to leave the Pensione Nardi in Via Venezia. We were advised that DELASEM was stopping the rent allowance for private accommodation. They offered us an alternative at a collective (like a kibbutz) that had been organised by the American Jewish Joint Distribution Committee. Better known as the Joint, this American Jewish charity organisation was very active in relief work at that time, helping Jewish survivors who had become displaced, stateless refugees. They did wonderful work assisting displaced persons in Italy, Germany, France and other European countries. The collective was housed in a villa that the Joint had leased from the man who owned it and who was known in the area as the *padrone* (proprietor).

The Villa Almansi was perched high on a hill and was visible long before it could be reached. It was on the way to Galluzzo on the outskirts of Florence. To get there from town, one had to cross the Ponte alla Carraia, one of the bridges that span the river Arno, and from there, catch a tram for a ten-minute ride to Due Strade. After walking up a steep, ancient, walled country road for another ten minutes and climbing up some stone stairs, behind a tall cast iron gate was the Villa Almansi. Surrounding the villa, ancient farmhouses were scattered among green fields and vineyards, where the *contadini* (peasants) who tilled these fields lived.



The villa Almansi on the top of the hill





The entrance to the villa

The Villa Almansi became our new home. Semicircular marble steps led to a large portal that led to a paved courtyard. Blue clusters of wisteria hung in abundance over the courtyard walls hiding their shabbiness. The air was heavy with their scent. In one corner of the courtyard was a well and in its icy-cold depth we submerged a string bag containing our butter and watermelon to keep them cool and fresh in the summer. In the corner opposite the well was the caretaker's three-roomed dwelling. Eugenio Pancrazzi lived there with his wife, Dina, his teenage son Franco and his old, bedridden, demented mother, whom we never saw but often heard. *Signora* Dina, the caretaker's wife, was a sweet, gentle lady who was liked by everyone. She often treated Giselle to bread with oil and sugar, which Giselle liked so much. Later she would ask *Signora* Dina for *pane olio e zucchero* in perfect Italian.

Between the well and the caretaker's abode was the entrance to the vestibule of the villa. To the right were two rooms. In one of them the possessions of the *padrone* were stored under lock and key. Opposite the entrance, to the left a staircase led to a number of rooms on the floor above and to the basement, where a large kitchen was situated where, for a while, communal meals were prepared on a roster system. Every day, two different women were rostered to cook the midday meal. Everyone cooked to their own taste and ability. Since they came from various countries and regions, some did not like the food that others cooked. The situation came to a head when a woman from Russia was on duty and cooked a beef dish to which she added sugar, a speciality in the region from which she came. However, the meat tasted awfully sweet and everyone hated it. No one ate it and the poor woman could not understand why no one liked this delicacy. Then the committee that had been elected by the residents of the kibbutz, and who could never agree on anything, miraculously agreed that it would be much better if the rations that we received from the Joint were divided among the families and that we were each to do our own cooking. We put a small electric cooker in the passage outside our door, where we did some cooking as well as boiling water for washing nappies.

The villa had many rooms but not enough to house the twenty young couples with small babies who had to live there. Two families had to share one room. The couple with whom we shared had a baby girl named Zelda who was a sickly child. In the room the single window and the door were exactly opposite each other, which created a draught when both were open at the same time.

We occupied the part near the window, and on each side of it stood two single beds. Inka and Hansi shared one; I occupied the other and Giselle's pram stood between the beds. Along the wall next to the door was another single bed that the other couple shared. Zelda's pram was next to their bed. A table and some chairs stood in the middle of the room and marked the boundary between our respective sides. A naked bulb hung over the table. The few possessions that we had were kept under our beds. A bucket of cold water poured over the terracotta-tiled floor kept the room cool on hot summer days.

To one side of the villa there was a walled garden with white, flowering bushes and stone benches that were recessed into a low wall. Every day throughout the summer, the inhabitants of the Villa Almansi congregated there. While minding their babies, they discussed many important issues of paramount concern to them: their future and that of their babies, the state of the world in general, the situation in Palestine, the American immigration quota, other immigration possibilities, and the price of various commodities on the black market. They laughed and gossiped. I listened and learned. They spoke of the pain and horrific war experiences that were still so very fresh in our minds and which had seared our souls, while the babies slept peacefully in their prams. In winter, people played cards. The babies grew into toddlers whilst their parents still did not know where and when their exile would end. No progress with emigration had been made so far.

The mood was that of impermanence – the future uncertain but optimistic.

In 1945 ORT (Organization for Educational Resources and Technoloical Training) began its work in displaced persons' camps.

ORT's mission was to train Jewish people in various skills and prepare them to be self-sufficient for the future. Sometime during our stay at the villa, the ORT sent a young Italian instructor and his apprentice to teach the people the craft of leather working. They learnt to make purses, wallets and some even advanced to making handbags. It was a productive pastime. Everyone enjoyed learning and they took pride in what they were able to produce. The Joint in conjunction with the UNRRA sustained us. Once a month we received food rations. We had to sell some of the food items to buy others that were not provided, like fresh fruit and vegetables and sometimes some meat. We sold some of the tinned food in the market and Miss Julia always bought our sugar from us.

Again, I was the youngest person, the only teenager among all these married people. I had no one my own age with whom to associate. I looked after Giselle and played with her; I took her for long walks in the pram and I read a lot. I once was so engrossed in a book that I burnt the broth and the pot that I was supposed to be watching.

The people who lived in the villa were of various social and intellectual backgrounds. They came from Russia, Poland, Ukraine, Austria and Germany; from small towns, big cities and remote small villages. There were a few who were illiterate. Although we were all survivors of the Holocaust, some had survived with the partisans and some had survived in hiding, while others survived on false identity papers. Most, however, were concentration camp survivors. Living together in such close proximity was far from easy, but we all shared the same fervent desire to be allowed to emigrate and begin a normal life.

Those who had relatives or friends in Canada, South Africa and America wanted to go to those countries, but there were immigration quotas to the United States and very long waiting lists everywhere else. We wanted to join our family in Jerusalem but there was still a blockade in Palestine and illegal immigration was not possible with a small child. Some others got in touch with distant cousins or with people whom they hardly knew in other parts of the world in case there might be a chance for emigrating. People who had no one to turn to travelled to the headquarters of the Joint in Rome every few weeks to inquire about emigration prospects. There were lists and quotas and people registered to go to any country at all that would take refugees. This was everyone's preoccupation. The world was still closed to us.

A few lucky people who had relatives in America would receive food parcels from them from time to time. One of the items was a box of semolina, which was excellent food for the babies. The lucky recipients of this food always generously shared it with the mothers who were not so lucky. Occasionally they would receive a parcel of discarded clothing, which they would sell and then use the money to buy things that they needed. We had no such luck. Only once did Inka receive a parcel. It arrived from Belgium from a school friend who lived there. Among some of the things were a few balls of wool, so I knitted some very pretty clothes for Giselle. The clothes so impressed some of the young mothers that I was asked to knit for their babies as well, and in that way I sometimes earned a dress or two from their parcels in lieu of payment.



Our ration cards got lost and try as we might, we could not remember how or where we had lost them. Inka and I walked along the Lungarno in Florence worrying about how we would manage, agonizing about the probability of having to buy our bread on the black market again, an expense that we could ill afford. We were speaking Polish and were absorbed in deep discussion about our predicament and our woes when we were startled by a small woman in a black, tailored suit who addressed us in Polish. She apologised for interrupting but said that she and her husband could not help overhearing some of our conversation and wondered whether there was anything they could do to help?

We thanked them and explained about the lost ration cards. We explained the reason and circumstances for our being in Florence, who we were and that Inka had a baby girl. They in turn told us that they had come to Italy from Palestine, where they now lived, and that they had come to Europe in the hope of finding any of their relatives who they had left behind in Poland when they had emigrated prior to the war.

They sympathised with us and offered us 2000 *lira*, which was the equivalent of just over three American dollars, quite a sum in those days, especially in our circumstances. We refused to accept the money, although we appreciated the gesture. They kept insisting. When we kept refusing the woman said; ‘Please accept it as a gift for your baby, not for yourself. You must not refuse if it is for your child.’ We thanked her and accepted their gift so graciously offered. We never saw them again and never learnt their name, but I have never forgotten their kindness, their humanity and particularly their tact. There are kind and caring people everywhere.

Two days later a large envelope arrived by mail containing our lost ration cards. Some kind, unknown person had found them and cared enough to post them to us.



Nonno (Grandfather), who always wore his brown, battered old hat a little tilted on the top of his head, hardly ever moved out of the huge upholstered armchair that had its place in front of the hearth. A fire glowed and flickered keeping *Nonno* warm while at the same time heating the contents of the oversized black pot that hung suspended permanently over the hearth. *Nonno* was an old man. Just how old he was no one knew but his age justified his leisure. His blue eyes, still bright and clear, twinkled from beneath his bushy eyebrows. A grey, equally bushy moustache hid most of his mouth, to which a lighted pipe clung permanently. From his position by the hearth and with his stern gaze, *Nonno* ruled his family.

Nonno was a widower. His family consisted of two married sons, an unmarried daughter and four grandchildren. All the family lived together under the same roof in a large farm house situated next to the villa. They were hard-working, honest folk who tilled the earth, grew grapes, figs, various vegetables and other crops. The land that they tilled belonged to the *padrone*. They were tenant farmers so that they had to share a certain percentage of the crops with him. They were kind, helpful and friendly people who always greeted me with '*Buon giorno, Signorina*' accompanied with a smile. When I wished them *buon appetito* if they happened to be eating, they always responded with; '*Vuole favorire, Signorina?*' (Would you like to join us, Miss?)

Giuseppe was *Nonno*'s oldest son and this seniority afforded his wife, Atila, the privilege of managing the household. She was the housekeeper and the cook; she also milked the cows and looked after the chickens. Atila was an amiable and wise woman who was well liked and respected. They had a son, Bruno, and a daughter, Adriana.

Julia was the wife of Eugenio, the younger son. Julia helped the men in the fields and vineyards as well as helping with assorted chores about the farm. They had two children: a son, Renato, who was about fourteen years old, a fair-haired, blue-eyed boy who played the piano accordion beautifully, and a five-year-old daughter, Pita.

Maria was *Nonno*'s only daughter and everyone's aunt. She never married. She was the proverbial maiden aunt. *Zia* Maria was of an uncertain age and certainly past her prime. Tall, of solid build and rather angular in appearance, she dressed plainly, mostly in a shapeless, cotton housedress. She had blue eyes that reflected the gentleness of her nature and a smile that showed perfect, straight, white teeth. Her hair was grey, cut into a bob and parted on the side. *Zia* Maria was kind and caring. She had both time and a smile for everyone who needed her. She took care of her niece Pita, played with her and other people's children. It was to *Zia* Maria that they came for comfort and advice. It was *Zia* Maria whose duty it was to look after *Nonno*. This he considered his privilege and his due. She was always there for him when her father called for one thing or another, be it to put a rug over his legs, to fetch tobacco for his pipe, make him some tea or serve him his lunch. She did it with grace and kindness. *Zia* Maria's

duties also encompassed the washing, ironing and mending.

On summer afternoons when all the chores for the day were done, she would sit outside in the yard and knit, embroider or mend, and the women from the adjoining houses would come with their own handiwork to join her for a little *chiacherata* (chatter), each recounting the day's happenings, their own or those of other people. I loved those afternoons! I liked to listen to their stories or gossip about this or that, including the latest news about Rita Hayworth, who was the most talked about actress in Italy at the time. *Zia* Maria would teach the young girls to knit and show them how to do various embroidery stitches, and she showed me how to turn a heel when I was trying to knit a sock for Giselle.

Zia Maria had a keen intellect but was modest and unassuming. She confided in me that she regretted not having had a better education because she would have wanted to know so many things. I loved to listen to her recount ghost stories and various legends and superstitions, some of which she believed to be true. One day she asked me if I believed in witches. She was very agitated and said, '*Signorina*, you know the farm on the other side of the road? Did you know that their cow died last week? And now the *Signora* Concetta has become very ill and they had a whole lot of bad luck lately. It is terrible. In desperation they sent for the priest to come and exorcise the house.' In a dramatic whisper she told me: 'The priest came and blessed all the rooms except for one. You know, he was unable to enter that room.' 'Why not?' I asked. With an appropriate pause, a whisper that made my skin crawl and a facial expression to match she said, 'Because ... THE DEVIL WAS IN THERE.' I froze, stone-like. After that, whenever I was nearing that

farmhouse on the way home from my English lesson, especially in the winter on the pitch-dark country road, I was panic-stricken and ran faster than lightning, too frightened to look behind me to see who or what may be following me.

Opposite the villa on the other side of the road was the farm of Guido and his brother Ernesto; they lived together with their wives and young children under the same roof. They grew various crops but also had chickens in their yard. Every afternoon I would cross the road to their farm to buy a freshly laid egg for little Giselle.

There was *Signora* Corinna, *la Postina* (postmistress), who walked the length of the Via della Campora every day delivering the mail. There was Franka, who was getting married to a handsome *Poliziotto* (policeman). We were all outside to see her off in her bridal finery on her way to church and to wish her *Buona Fortuna* on the day of her marriage, and we were all presented with some prettily wrapped sugar almonds they called *confetti*.

Further down the street in a double-storey villa lived *La Contessa* who, being a countess and a *padrona*, did not socialise with the neighbours. She lived alone with her housekeeper. Hers was the only house in the area that had a telephone; however, she was kind and when there was an emergency and one of the children in the villa was ill and the parents needed the use of a telephone, she would always oblige.

Once a month, the women of the neighbouring farms would share the task of bread baking. Early in the morning, the men fired up the large brick oven that stood in a paddock and got it ready for the women, who then used it to bake large round loaves. The bread baking lasted from early morning till late afternoon. I liked

to watch them and was interested to learn how things were done. I was always welcome. One day, long trestle tables were erected outside in the sun and on them figs were laid out. They were flattened and spread one next to the other and simply left to dry in the sun. I was fascinated by this natural, uncomplicated process.

Sometimes on a summer's day Gabriella, a young friend of Maria's came to visit and we all watched and helped her with her job of making costume jewellery in coloured mosaic patterns. She was making them for a shop that was selling them to tourists. They were lovely colourful pieces. The women sat outside at a trestle table helping her cut small pieces of coloured sticks, which she made into lovely patterns using a metal receptacle containing a soft substance and filled with coloured pieces that formed intricate mosaics.

There was always much activity outside in the yard. There were no idle hands. Everyone was hard working or creating and crafting beautiful things, but come Sunday, no work was done. All the neighbours were transformed. Wearing their Sunday best, they walked to church. On summer evenings when they congregated in the front of the villa, I sat with them as they discussed the sermon, the daily news and Rita Hayworth, but always there was singing, especially of the latest *canzoni* (songs), often accompanied by the piano-accordion played by Renato.

In the fall, bunches of ripe, juicy grapes and dark blue bunches of flavoursome muscatels hung heavily from grapevines ready for harvesting. At harvest time the *contadini* pooled their resources to gather the grapes and fill their wooden carts. It was hard work and lasted many days. When the last vineyard had been harvested and the grapes stored, there was a big celebration traditionally

known as *La Festa dell'uva* in honor of the successful conclusion of the grape harvest. The *Festa* took place in the evening in one of the barns that had been decorated with the fruits of their labour, where all the *contadini* with their families, young and old, gathered dressed in their Sunday best. The young people danced late into the night to the lively music played on the piano-accordion by young Renato. Sitting along the walls of the barn, the old men and women, many swathed in black shawls, sang along and clapped their hands to the rhythm of the music, while at the same time keeping a watchful eye on the young dancing couples. I was always invited to join them in these festivities and in the dancing, which I enjoyed immensely. They all befriended me and included me. I liked their company and learnt a lot from them.



The wife of a wealthy Milan shoe manufacturer who was a patient of Dr H, happened to mention on one of her visits to him that she was looking for someone to help her with her housework. The good doctor mentioned it to Inka and Hansi when they visited, and the three of them decided that it would be a good opportunity for me. Why they thought so, I will never know but I was an obedient girl and believed that people had my best interest at heart. Besides, being older than I was, they must know better, so I consented.

Arrangements were made for me to meet the *la Signora* on her next visit to Florence and we would travel together on the train to Milan and from there to Chiochio, a small village where she lived.

I met *la Signora* at the train station in Florence. She was middle-aged, a woman of average height, wearing a hat and coat of a dull greyish-green colour. There was nothing remarkable about her features. She had a condescending manner that did not endear her to me.

As soon as we met, she began to lecture me about the danger of speaking to strangers or listening to them because they might not be nice people; in fact, they might be people with certain ideologies and she did not want them to know where we were going. I was taken aback by her suspicion. I sensed that she was genuinely nervous and frightened of those strangers who might harm her. It was before the elections and a time of great political unrest in Italy. My job, the reason for our journey, was never mentioned and neither was the matter of wages. It all seemed to be taken for granted.

We arrived at the village at dusk and silhouettes of trees with bare branches stood ghost-like in the still, grey autumn mist. *La Signora* and her husband lived in a double-storey villa at the edge of the village square. There were people in the house when we arrived: because it was the weekend, they had house guests. It appeared that their daughter, a glamorous young woman, and her friend (or fiancé) were entertaining some of their friends. The conversation was lively. They were laughing, obviously enjoying themselves. I was utterly ignored. A meal was served in the dining room and I sat with them at the table and felt most uncomfortable. I was terribly timid and did not utter a word.

After dinner I was told what my duties would be and shown into a small room with a narrow bed that stood beneath a very

small window. A single light hung over the bed. A two-shelved chest of drawers and a bucket and broom in a corner completed the furnishings. It was the maid's room! I sat down on my bed and felt abandoned and very lonely, although I was relieved that I did not have to sit with those strangers who took my presence for granted. I had nothing to read but thankfully I was tired from the whole day's travelling and I fell asleep.

I woke early next morning. It was part of my job to fetch the water from the well in the square and carry it to the villa. It was freezing cold on these crisp autumn mornings and I had to make the trip several times. That night I cried myself to sleep. The next night I did some thinking and asked myself, 'Why am I here? What am I doing here? What future is there for me here?' And I knew that I did not have to – or want to – be a domestic. I was missing out on my English lessons and I was still hoping to go to school. I decided to tell *la Signora* that I wanted to go back to Florence. She was genuinely surprised at my decision and could not understand why I did not want to stay, but she arranged for my return. The pretty village of Chiocchio remains in my memory because of its strange name, because I was so unhappy there, but particularly because I had made a significant life decision for myself and it felt right.

I was not welcomed with open arms when I got back. This opened my eyes to the fact that my future was for me to decide and no one else. Inka and Dr H did not try to find any more jobs for me. However, Inka came home from a visit to Dr H one day very pleased and informed me that he wanted to adopt me. He had no children and his wife was a sick lady who lived in a health resort in Rapallo on the Riviera. I was to live with her and be her

companion. He wanted me to come and see him in person and he would explain things to me and arrange for me to meet his wife. I went to his surgery and I sat on the other side of his large desk and in mid-sentence he got up, came over to me, put his arm around me and tried to kiss me! I was stunned. My shock must have been written all over my face that he immediately regained his composure and sat down behind his desk resuming a professional air as if nothing untoward had happened and said something to the effect that the adoption would not take place and saw me to the door. I related the episode to Inka and Hansi and that was the last anyone mentioned the idea of adoption.

Then I got a real job for which I was actually paid a small wage. I worked for Mr Hagen, who was a furrier importing scraps of rabbit fur that arrived in large bails, the contents of which were emptied onto a large, wooden sorting table. My job was to sort the pieces of white fur according to size and quality. I liked working there. The atmosphere was homely and the people were nice.

The Hagens were German Jews who had survived the war in France, where they had lived in hiding. Before the war Mr Hagen had been an importer of furs. He had come to Florence after the war with his wife and their daughters, Ruth and Petra, and they were trying to start anew. They lived in an apartment and one of the rooms served as a workshop where I worked together with their daughters.

Petra was a quiet, serious girl. She was my age, and after school she worked with us. How I envied her schooling, but she was a very unhappy, troubled girl who had not come to terms with having been sent to live with strangers in Switzerland for the duration of

the war. At war's end, the Swiss family had returned Petra to her grateful parents, whom she now resented. Not surprisingly, the Swiss couple had become her family and she missed them terribly. In contrast, the older daughter, Ruth, was a lot of fun. We would sing together while we worked. She would talk a lot and tell funny stories that she often exaggerated but she would make me laugh. Short in stature like her parents and not as deep and sensitive as her sister Petra, she was full of life and mischief.

Once she offered to take me to a Jewish youth club so that I could meet some young people. I suspect that it was a pretext to get her mother's permission to go out in the evening. She graciously introduced me to her friends, girls and boys who were older than I, and much more sophisticated and worldly. They seemed so uninhibited, while I felt very uncomfortable with strangers, but they were very friendly towards me. They belonged to well-to-do Italian families and one of the boys even had a car!

One Saturday evening Ruth and her friends decided to go to a nightclub. I had never been to one but I loved dancing and I was curious. They chose the Baglioni nightclub that was situated on the top floor of the hotel of the same name in the Piazza Stazione. I was told that the interior of the club was a replica of the Milan railway station, which was supposedly very beautiful. It was! It was *the* nightclub in Florence, a very elegant place with a large ballroom brightly lit by glittering chandeliers. White tablecloths covered the tables that faced a highly polished parquetry dance floor. An orchestra played dance music and the patrons were very glamorous – especially the ladies, who all wore long evening gowns. It was dazzling and I was fascinated. I had only read about

such places in books and it was all so wonderful. I wore a white blouse with a little round collar and a short, checked, pleated skirt and a bolero. Both these items of clothing had been made for me from two large scarves that I had been given. Truthfully, I looked like a schoolgirl at a school fete and I was totally out of place. A waiter, who took his job very seriously, showed us to a table. The music was wonderful and one of the boys asked me to dance with him, which was a treat. When we resumed our seats, the waiter discreetly whispered something to one of the boys and very soon afterwards the decision was made to leave, most probably because of me and my schoolgirl clothes, which made me look even younger than I was and truly out of place in the glamour of that venue. They were all very chivalrous about it even though their evening had been spoilt. Strangely enough I did not feel at all embarrassed. I was Cinderella. I had been to my ball and had enjoyed the experience tremendously.



I made a friend! She smiled at me from her window which faced the country lane that I passed on my daily walks with Giselle. At first we just waved and smiled at each other. Then one day she beckoned to me and invited me to visit her. She was housebound at that time, recovering from a serious illness. Her name was Ivana.

Ivana was an only child who lived with her parents in a first-floor flat in the Via della Campora opposite the Villa Almansi. Her father was a furrier and he worked at home, sewing together pieces



Guta, Ivana and Graziella, Galuzzo 1947

of fur on an overlocker, creating large pelts from which other furriers would make coats. He showed me how to sew fur together and he sometimes allowed me to practice on the machine. Ivana's mother was a kind, sweet, petite lady who cooked the tastiest deep-fried artichokes and who taught me to make delicious spaghetti sauce, which my grandchildren have now named 'Nanny's special spaghetti sauce'.

Ivana was my age and we immediately became very good friends. When she had recovered, in her company I learnt to act as any other teenager would act, to have fun and enjoy what young people enjoy. It was all a new experience for me. She let me read her movie magazines and the weekly magazines, which had serialised romances printed in them. How impatiently we waited for each edition and the next episode of a story. As soon as it arrived, Ivana would come running with the story and we would sit in the corner of the garden and read it together. It was something akin to today's serialised television soap operas. At the time I thought the stories were most romantic. We sang the latest *canzoni* and practiced the latest dances to their tunes. My Italian vocabulary improved enormously. Ivana was so proud of the way I spoke it.

Ivana and I would often go sightseeing to the city by tram, where we visited the many churches of Florence and she would explain about the various saints and *madonnas* and what specific miracles each of them performed. We would walk along the Lungarno and she would point out the bridges that spanned the river and she would teach me their names. In the summer we would go to the Boboli Gardens to enjoy the beauty of this park where we would walk along the path and avenues and admire the sculptures that

we encountered on the way to the old, but very beautiful, Basilica di San Miniato al Monte. Ivana was very proud of her beloved city and was happy to show it to me and share its beauty.

Sometimes, as a special outing, we would go to the cinema to watch a film starring our favourite movie idols. We saw *Blood and Sand* with Tyrone Power in which he played a dashing torero, with Rita Hayworth as his co-star. They were the most popular movie stars in Italy in those days. We saw *Blood and Sand* three times thanks to the way that the cinemas operated at the time. There were no reserved seats and there was standing room only until a seat became available. The film ran continuously. One could get in at any time during any part of the story, and once inside see the film as many times as one wanted. When Tyrone Power came to Florence for a visit, Ivana and I spent half a day in front of the Hotel Excelsior where he stayed just to catch a glimpse of him. Another heart-throb was the handsome British actor Robert Taylor, who starred beside Vivien Leigh in the film *Waterloo Bridge*, a romantic tragedy that caused Ivana and me to cry tears of sorrow all through that film. We read all that was written about our movie idols, knew their birthdates and followed every bit of gossip that concerned them.

The day that Ivana and I went to see *Annie Get Your Gun*, a fun musical starring Betty Grable, I wore the new, sand-coloured shoes that Hansi had bought for me ‘very cheaply’ at the market. Hansi was very impressed with them because they were ‘flexible’ and they could really bend. It was something very new at the time he was told. When I tried them on and complained that they were a little tight, he said that the salesman, who had demonstrated the

elasticity of the shoes, told him that their flexibility ensured they would definitely stretch. I wore those shoes to the cinema where there was standing room only. With very sore and blistered feet, we boarded the tram home, both of us carrying our shoes in our hands. Luckily there were not many people in the tram to notice our bare feet. We enjoyed the film and thought it hilarious. We giggled all the way home despite the uncomfortable shoes.

Another film that we saw that I loved was *The Great Waltz* with Louise Rainer. It was the life story of Johann Strauss, the waltz king. The music was wonderful. I learnt to sing all the Strauss waltzes from that film.



For a long time we had been asking for a room of our own in the villa. We were promised one as soon as it became available. In the meantime, we were told to have patience. Patience was one of the most overused words of the time and its virtue was wearing thin. We lived under unbearably stressful and unpleasant conditions. Not only was our room small and crowded but our room-mates were also becoming increasingly difficult to live with. The woman with whom we shared the room was particularly narrow-minded and quarrelsome. Opening the window for fresh air in that over-crowded room became a major undertaking. The moment we opened the window in the morning, she would immediately close it claiming that her baby would catch a cold. If it happened that her child did become ill, she blamed Inka and abused her for

having opened the window. And that was only one of a myriad of daily aggravations.

We had just about given up hope of having our own space when a room did become available. We were ecstatic! We could open the window and keep it open; we could wash the floor when we thought it needed washing; and instead of keeping things under the bed, we could hang the few items of clothing that we possessed in the makeshift wardrobe that Hansi had made out of two planks of wood, some wire and an old sheet strung on a piece of string that served as a door. We made our room as pleasant and homely as our circumstances permitted. We spread *Frau Lehman's* tablecloth, a parting gift when we left Germany, on the table and as a final touch, Inka and I cut a hole in an old straw hat and dressed the naked electric bulb that hung over the table with it. It was a most original lampshade and we collected many compliments for our ingenuity from the cohabitants of the villa.

Nearly four years had passed. Our life as displaced persons still remained unchanged. With every passing year we grew more desperate and uncertain of our future. Every so often Hansi travelled to Rome to pay a visit to the offices of the Joint to make inquiries regarding our prospects for migration to somewhere, anywhere. Sometimes he was able to register our names on a waiting list of a country that would declare a quota for the intake of displaced persons. But nothing was certain, nothing concrete. Thus far Jews were still being refused entry to the Holy Land. Palestine, as it was known then, was under the British Mandate and to appease the Arab nations, many obstacles were put in the way of Jewish immigration. There existed a possibility for young,

unattached people to immigrate to Palestine illegally, which was a risky exercise. Although a few of the ships making this clandestine journey did manage to slip through the blockade, many ships were intercepted. People were shot and killed as they endeavored to jump into the water. Others were detained and sent to Cyprus, where they were kept in detention camps. That method of immigration was out of the question for couples with children and although I was young and unattached, I was not brave enough to leave on my own; and besides, I did not want to end up in a detention camp again, so I stayed.

In May 1948, we all sat glued to the only radio in the villa listening with bated breath as each nation cast its vote for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. At the conclusion, we heard the wonderful announcement that the United Nations had declared Palestine a homeland for the Jewish people and that it would be known as Israel. How privileged we were that after years of displacement, torture and slavery, we lived to witness the Jewish homeland reborn and the emergence of a national home for our people. A 2000-year-old dream had come true! There was much rejoicing and celebrating, much singing and dancing and the Jewish community of Florence held a celebration that many of the residents of the Villa Almansi attended. I was among them.

Sadly, the euphoria was short lived. The very day after Israel was declared an independent nation, the Arab states in the region attacked the fledgling state and declared war. There was much loss of life. Many newly arrived Holocaust survivors who had managed to slip through the blockade lost their lives defending the country in which they had hoped to settle and live in peace. I never got to see

my grandmother. During the siege of Jerusalem, my grandmother died of a stroke. It was the end of yet another dream.



Inka was expecting another baby. In December of 1948 she gave birth to another beautiful little girl with lovely brown eyes in a small round face. She had dark hair and olive skin and she cried a



*Giselle and I,
Florence 1948*

lot. They named her Rosa Zahava but we called her Rosie. Inka developed kidney problems and it became my responsibility to wash nappies every day from morning till noon in a basin of water that stood on two chairs in the passage outside our room. Disposable nappies or nappy wash services were still unheard of. I hardly had time to breathe. When the baby was a few weeks old, both Inka and Hans went to Rome to see what was happening regarding emigration and left me with both the children. It was a hectic time for me. I managed with the help of

some of our neighbours who watched over Giselle when required. Giselle was not quite three years old, a gorgeous little girl with blond curls and large blue eyes who spoke Italian and German but could not pronounce the letter 'r'.

Many people received letters in English from relatives and friends in the United States and Canada. I was the only person in the villa with a passing knowledge of English. I was in demand for translating these into Polish, German and Yiddish. Although my English vocabulary was not yet extensive, I managed. It was good practice.

As my English was progressing well and I spoke Italian quite fluently, Miss Julia, with whom I'd always kept in contact, was adamant that it was now time for me to think about school. I was very excited about the prospect of beginning school again. I arrived home and told Inka what Miss Julia had suggested regarding my schooling. Inka dismissed the notion without even giving it a thought saying, 'What is the use of you starting school now. It will not be long before we will be able to go to Jerusalem and then you will have to interrupt your schooling again.' I told Miss Julia what Inka had said and she disagreed. But Inka was adamant. I was not defiant enough and always too timid to win an argument with her. Besides, I always trusted and deferred to her, thinking that being older, she knew better. Miss Julia was angry and said that I was wasting my time washing nappies and minding babies and that if I could not go to school, I should at least learn something useful. She recommended a convent where the nuns taught embroidery, for which they were renowned. The suggestion appealed to me because I enjoyed handcraft.

The convent was not far from the villa where I lived so the next morning I took baby Rosie for a walk in the pram and paid a visit to the convent. I was admitted by two nuns. I asked them about the possibility of learning embroidery. One of the nuns asked me who I

was. I introduced myself and told them where I lived and that I was a refugee. I heard the second nun whisper to the first, ‘Tell her to come to Mass on Sunday!’ Ignoring my question about embroidery classes, they introduced me instead to a novice whom they had sent for, and one of the nuns asked me if I would like to become a nun also. I explained to her that I was Jewish. I was not prepared for her reply. ‘Look how you people have suffered for your Jewishness. Wouldn’t you rather be a Christian? Why don’t you come to Mass on Sunday?’ Not one word of sympathy was expressed for what had happened to my people. I answered her politely that precisely because of my suffering, and more so now that the suffering was over, what would be the point? I didn’t have to convert. Now that I was free to keep my faith. I would defiantly remain who I was. All I had come for was to inquire about embroidery lessons. In a voice hard and cold she said that they had no place for me and would not be able to teach me. I thanked her and left, seething inwardly. That is how my embroidery career ended before it had begun. I related the incident to Miss Julia, who wisely chose not to comment on it, though I could sense her anger.

I could certainly not complain of a dull life. One never knew what the next day would bring. In the spring of 1949, we were advised that we would have to vacate the Villa Almansi and leave Florence. We were told that we would be relocated and sent to a place by the name of Ladispoli. I was heartbroken having to leave my kind and caring friends and the city that I had come to love – the city that had made me feel like a welcome guest for the best part of four years where, despite hardship and uncertainty, I had been the happiest.

Reluctantly, we left Florence for Ladispoli. I was quite determined to hate it; instead, I was enchanted. Ladispoli was a small fishing village on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea fifty kilometres west of Rome. There the sea was an expanse of sapphire-blue water, edged by a beach of silver-speckled, black sand. The streets were lined with tall palm trees, their green fan-shaped foliage swayed gently in the breeze and reached for the cloudless azure-coloured sky. The sight of the sea so vast and so infinite made me gasp in awe and admiration. It was an extraordinary vision that literally took my breath away and wrought a profound impression on me. I had never seen the sea before and it surpassed all imagination.

For three seasons of the year, Ladispoli was just a small, quiet place, whose inhabitants lived simple lives. They lived in small houses within the boundaries of a few streets and the beach. Not much happened there that was out of the ordinary, with the exception perhaps of when we refugees arrived at the Villa Moretti or when some fishermen brought in an enormous fish in their catch.

There were no cars and no traffic in Ladispoli. The villas in the main street, which belonged to some wealthy *padrone* who lived in Rome, were usually closed until the summer, but with the arrival of summer Ladispoli came to life. It transformed into a playground for holiday-makers throbbing with life and music and became a lively holiday resort. The villas were opened to accommodate throngs of summer guests. In the evenings the streets were brightly lit and myriad little coloured lights illuminated the facades of the many villas and dance halls. Over the loudspeakers came the sound of popular music of the time, working its magic enticing patrons young and old to frequent the various romantically lit

gardens, where on portable wooden floors, among small tables, couples danced the latest tangos, rumbas and sambas. Live bands of musicians played the saxophone, drums and usually the piano-accordion while young local fishermen in their everyday fishermen's clothes sang the latest American songs and the beautiful Italian *canzoni*, delighting their audiences with magnificent voices. For them, it was the summer of fame and extra earnings.

The Villa Moretti, which had become our new home, was a much larger place than the Villa Almansi in Florence. It was a guesthouse that housed stateless refugees. It also accommodated more people who were resettled from Rome, people whom I had never met before. Inka, Hansi and the little girls shared a room and I had the unexpected pleasure of having been allocated a room to myself. It was a three-cornered room and very small, but it was my very own and it had the added attraction of having a window that faced the sea. It afforded me the luxury of being able to watch the sun rise out of the sea at dawn and see the red and golden ball sink slowly back into it at sunset leaving the sea dark and mysterious. Inka, Hansi, the little girls and I spent a lot of time on the beach wearing hand-knitted, woolen, two-piece swimsuits. Hansi endeavored to teach me to swim but I never learnt. I was too frightened of the sea and its mysterious depths. I played with Giselle in the sand and took baby Rosie for walks in the pram and I read a lot.

The Villa Moretti also boasted a *giardino danzante*, a dance garden. In the evenings when the band began playing and the music carried the sound up to our rooms, I could hardly keep my

feet still. Sometimes a group of us would go down to the *giardino* to dance. There was romance in the air. It was great fun! I was nineteen and life seemed worth living. How I loved to dance! I could have spent my life dancing then.

Ladispoli also boasted two outdoor cinemas, but only in the summer. A portable screen and chairs were placed under a romantic, star-lit sky. In the event of a summer shower, everyone ran for shelter and came back later when the rain stopped and screening resumed. In the summer of 1949 the film *For Whom the Bell Toll* was screened. It was Ernest Hemingway's account of the Spanish Civil War starring Ingrid Bergman and Gary Cooper. Ingrid Bergman was at the height of her career and the darling of Italian audiences. The short-cropped, blonde curls that she wore for her role in this film inspired the fashion that year and many a young woman cut off her long tresses to imitate the film star. Her name was also romantically linked with that of Roberto Rossellini, the Italian film director. It was the gossip on everyone's lips, as well as of every newspaper and film magazine.

Towards the end of summer, Ladispoli reverted to the quiet fishing village of the blue sea and mineral-rich black beach. Its inhabitants resumed their everyday tasks and customs, one of which was the afternoon siesta. One day at siesta time, a great commotion suddenly interrupted the quiet of the village. I heard loud voices. People were shouting and calling out to each other. I looked out of my window and saw that the streets were filling with people running towards the beach. There were rumours of a disaster. Speculation as to what had befallen the village was rife. There was talk about a fire. There was panic as people were woken

from their siesta. Calling out through my window to inquire what was happening, I was told by a choir of voices that Ingrid Bergman and Roberto Rosellini had just arrived for a meal at the small fish restaurant near the beach, gracing our village with their presence. Everyone was running to catch a glimpse of their favourite movie star. Well, I was not going to be left behind. I was not going to miss any of the excitement and the opportunity of seeing Ingrid Bergman. I was dressed in no time and ran out to join the crowd.

The restaurant was housed in a small, wooden hut with a low entrance door and one small window. Uneventful Ladispoli was a good choice for a tête-à-tête meal for a couple of celebrities intent on some privacy. Here the crowd was not to be compared to the huge crowds in front of the Excelsior in Florence. Here there were only the locals who considered themselves privileged that such an opportunity presented itself in their midst. While we stood around the restaurant waiting for a glimpse of our illustrious visitors, a minute-by-minute bulletin on the progress of the meal was provided by the waitress and the kitchen staff who strutted proudly and importantly in and out, not unlike some press secretaries. They kept us informed about what was ordered and what was being eaten at any given moment, which course was being served, the approximate duration of the meal and most importantly, when, according to the estimation of the staff, the meal would be finished and the honoured guests would be leaving the restaurant. While we stood waiting, we endeavoured to catch a glimpse of the stars by looking in through the tiny window of the restaurant, but with little success. Every time the door of the restaurant opened, a murmur of excitement ran through the crowd: ‘They are coming,

they are coming!', followed by disappointment when it was only the waitress imparting some other tidbit of news. After many more rumours and false alarms and a long long wait, they emerged. A reverential hush greeted the couple; all eyes were on the tall, blonde, lovely young woman with eyes the colour of the sea on a cloudy day. It was Ingrid Bergman in person. She wore no makeup, or so it seemed. Her hair was straight, parted at the side, falling loosely over one side of her face. She wore a khaki-coloured safari slack suit, which complemented the colour of her eyes. Hers was a natural beauty; she was simply elegant. She had both poise and presence. I congratulated myself on my luck. I was near enough to touch her, to see her clearly. We were a well-behaved crowd. There was no shouting or calling out. We all looked at her with respect and reverence befitting such a celebrity. She nodded and smiled slightly and then it was over. Before anyone realised it, the famous couple had left in a shiny, bright-red sports car, escorted by madly running, arm-waving villagers – and me. Even the red sports car was a celebrity. Owning a car or driving one was then not even a dream for the people who ran after it. It was an eventful day for the people of Ladispoli. For me, a young girl, it was a priceless experience and remains a cherished recollection now.



There was a young woman at the Villa Moretti who had learnt English in Rome and whose lessons had also ceased just as mine had since coming to live in Ladispoli. We began to converse in English. Slowly and tentatively at first, but in time I became more

confident and spoke less haltingly. It was a great pastime that I enjoyed and from which I benefited.

I visited Rome with a friend and went sightseeing. We visited the Vatican, where my friend was barred from entering without a jacket. A man whose business it was to hire jackets to tourists offered to lend him one at an exorbitant price but when he heard that we spoke Italian, he reduced the price to a fraction of the original. I climbed the steep, narrow stairs to the top of St. Peter's Basilica and carved my initials on the wall among all the other millions of initials. We strolled about the Spanish Steps in the Piazza di Spagna, went to the market, looked at the shops and saw the Colosseum. Rome was so much bigger and busier than Florence and the language spoken in Rome was pronounced differently from that in Tuscany. I missed Florence and my friends there. Once I did have an opportunity to travel to Florence on a night train to visit my friends and arrived there in the morning with a deep cut in my head caused by the fall of a large, heavy tin of margarine that I was given to take with me for sale at the market in Florence. A visit to the doctor and a few stitches to my head did not prevent me from enjoying the company of my friends.

The summer ended on a high note with the arrival of a most important, long-awaited letter that promised to change our lives yet again. The letter came from the British Legation in Rome on behalf of the Commonwealth Government of Australia informing us – Hansi, Inka and me – that permission had been granted for our immigration to Australia and inviting us to come to Rome for an interview. Australia, one of the countries on whose list Hansi had registered our names, had responded to our plight and there

was a future to look forward to. We were euphoric.

There were many requirements that we had to comply with and we were only too happy to oblige. We needed to supply certificates from the Prefecture that we had no criminal records and that we were people of good repute. We had to be immunised against Yellow Fever, have Smallpox vaccinations and have chest X-rays to ensure that none of us had Tuberculosis. Once the results of those tests were ready, we had to visit the doctor for a complete check-up. We breathed a sigh of relief when we received a clean bill of health and all the papers and certificates were duly signed and stamped by the appropriate authorities. All these papers were then sent to Australia for processing while we waited anxiously for notification if or when we would be granted our landing permits.

We had to go to Rome a few more times before all formalities were completed and our landing permits arrived. On one such a trip to Rome, Inka indulged in a visit to the hairdresser. I had never been to a hairdressing salon. I perceived such an establishment to be most glamorous and I badly wanted to try and see what it was like. Inka said that there was no need for me to go to a hairdresser unless I wanted to have my hair cut. I had lovely long hair and I did not really want to have it cut, but since that was the only condition for me to visit a hairdressing salon, I decided to have my hair cut.

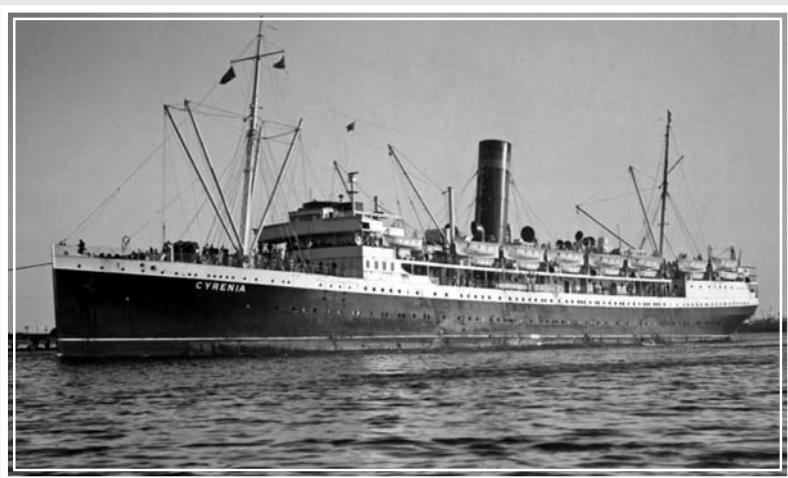
It was the Jewish community in Australia, the Federation of the Australian Jewish Welfare and Relief societies, which had sponsored us as we had no friends or relations in Australia. They guaranteed our accommodation and took full responsibility so that we would not be a burden to the Australian Government. The HIAS (Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society), an organisation based

in the United States, had arranged for our passage and fares to Australia. We were to leave from Genoa on the Greek ship the SS *Cyrenia* on 14 August 1949. After four-and-a-half years we were leaving the friendly shores of Italy. We travelled to Genoa by train and there we spent one night in a hotel with many other refugees bound for the far away shores of a country that we knew very little about except for the fact that they were willing to accept us.

We each received one English pound from the representative of the Joint before boarding the ship for the voyage to Australia. Those three English pounds accounted for all the money that we possessed.

NEW
AUSTRALIANS
PART THREE

3



The Cyrenia, August/September 1949

The SS *Cyrenia*, a ship flying the Greek flag, was berthed at the dock on 14 August 1949 in the port of Genoa awaiting our arrival. I was amazed at her dimensions. She was a very impressive, beautiful, gleaming white ship the size of a three-storey building and I vividly recall how her portholes and windows reflected the sun on that memorable afternoon. The enormity of her interior was awe-inspiring. A labyrinth of decks and spiral metal stairways led to the many cabins and various staterooms. There were lounge rooms and dining rooms and ballrooms all with mahogany-lined walls, and the floors were polished to perfection. There was even a well-stocked library. I was overwhelmed. I was convinced that I would get lost and never find my way out of the maze.

Some 3000 passengers were aboard the *Cyrenia* when she sailed on that voyage to Australia. Among them were hundreds of Italian men who had been obliged to leave their country and their families behind in order to find work in Australia due to widespread unemployment in their country. Additionally, there were a few hundred stateless Jewish refugees, myself among them, who were eager to find at long last a permanent home in Australia and begin a peaceful, normal new life.

We travelled third class. Inka, Hansi and their children were given a deck cabin. I shared a cabin below deck with five other women. The cabin had no portholes. It was stuffy but roomy enough and was equipped with three double bunks. I had a top bunk and Saba Dawidowicz, a young woman who, as it happened, came from my hometown of Lodz but whom I had not known previously, occupied the bunk beneath mine. I would have slept through many a breakfast had it not been for Saba waking me in

the mornings by kicking my mattress with her foot. Besides being very friendly, Saba had a great sense of humour. She and I became firm friends and our friendship that began all those years ago on that ship has lasted to this very day.

The ship's company owned three Greek records of bazooka music and the crew played them day in and day out for the duration of the thirty-two days of the voyage. The past was behind us, and the future suspended between sea and sky. The journey was pleasant, and the weather was good most of the time. I soon met a nice crowd of young people with whom I spent time on deck. As most of the day was spent on deck, people quickly became acquainted with one another. Among the people who befriended me were Lottie and Walter Hampel from Dresden. They had a niece in Australia who had arrived a few months earlier. They said that they would like me to meet Irma as she was my age and they promised to introduce us.

The *Cyrenia* was not a luxury ship, certainly not to be compared with the luxury cruise ships of today, but for me and I think for most of the refugees, it was a blissful interlude away from all care. We ate well, although after a while all the food, be it spaghetti or ice cream, tasted and smelled of the sea. My favourite and the most unforgettable food on that voyage were the bananas. We had them for breakfast every morning and I could not get enough of them. Bananas in Europe were expensive and a luxury, certainly not everyone's staple food. I liked them very much and I still do. Anyone at our table who did not want their bananas would offer them to me.

For me the voyage on the *Cyrenia* was one of discovery. We stopped at exotic and, what were to me, unknown and unheard of

places like Port Said in Egypt and Aden in Arabia. Regrettably, we were not allowed to disembark in those ports because of the still-unresolved conflict in the area regarding the war with Israel.

The people who lived in those parts looked interesting. They wore white turbans that framed their dark, weatherworn faces and they wore flowing white robes. They arrived in small boats full of merchandise and they held the items for sale aloft for everyone to see. They had etched leather handbags, wallets, ornaments, elephants carved of wood, cloth lengths and much more. They moved their boats as close to the ship as they could. They loudly extolled their wares in a language that no one understood. As I had no money to spend, I stood near the rails on deck engrossed by the spectacle. I watched as they bartered. I admired their ingenuity and the successful transactions of those traders. I was intrigued by the way that goods and money changed hands so deftly and skillfully. Although items were thrown from boat to ship and ship to boat, neither merchandise nor money were lost. Even if some money did miss a boat and fell into the water, there were children at hand on the boats to dive in and retrieve it.

Later we stopped in Colombo, the capital of Ceylon (now Sri Lanka), where we were allowed to disembark. It was a hot and humid summer evening and my first taste of the tropics. I found myself in a large city square with tall palm trees where vendors were selling bananas and coconuts. I was told that the milk of the coconut was a delicacy and that I should try some. I was offered the milk to drink straight from the coconut, but it was not to my taste at all. In Italy the flesh of the coconut was very expensive and was sold in very small pieces that were kept on ice. Here, to my amazement,

the entire coconut was discarded and thrown on a heap after the milk, which looked like milky water, had been consumed.

My most unpleasant – albeit memorable – experience in Colombo was a rickshaw ride. The rickshaw was a popular form of transport in that country and it was offered as part of a tourist attraction. The rickshaw, a chair-like, hooded vehicle on two wheels, was drawn by a baldheaded, barefoot skeletal man dressed in a sarong which covered the lower part of his body. His expressionless eyes had sunk deep into his skull and his every bone protruded from his bare back. His arms and skin resembled cracked, brown leather. With his head bent, he ran fast, not unlike a horse, pulling the rickshaw. With passengers inside, he exerted himself to the limit. Some people suggested that we take a rickshaw ride and I reluctantly climbed in but as soon as the unfortunate man began to run, pulling us along, I told him to stop and I climbed out again. The poor man was quite upset and could not understand why I did not want to continue. He took it as a personal affront. My friends tried to persuade me to continue the ride saying that if people did not use the rickshaw, the driver would be deprived of his livelihood. I paid my fare, but I could not continue the ride.

On the voyage from Ceylon to Fremantle, the ship sailed along smoothly in calm waters. We sat on deck warmed by the sun and fanned by the pleasant breeze and watched the waves and the flying fish. I was carefree and optimistic. The time passed rather pleasantly in good company and with interesting conversation. There was dancing at night, a beauty contest and a baby contest. I entered little Giselle's name in a beauty contest and she won!

At the Port of Fremantle, our first port of call in Australia, officials from the Department of Immigration of Australia

came aboard to check and stamp our identity papers and travel documents. This procedure took most of the day so not many of us were able to disembark. Two gentlemen from the Federation of Australian Jewish Welfare Societies also came aboard. One was Mr David Abzac, representing the Australian Jewish Welfare and Relief Society in Melbourne, and the other was Mr Walter Brand, Secretary of the Federation of Australian Jewish Welfare Societies based in Sydney. They helped us to fill out custom forms and answered many questions about employment and housing. Some people even wanted to know if they happened to know their relatives and friends in Australia. They also handed out letters addressed to all of the Jewish immigrants who had been sponsored by the Jewish Welfare Society and who had no relatives in Australia. I opened my letter that read, 'Dear Miss Kopel, We welcome you to Australia ... You have been allocated to the State of Victoria.' Panic! Where and what was Victoria? The only city that most of us knew was Sydney, which I thought was the capital of Australia and that was where I thought we were going, but Victoria? The people who were allocated to Sydney looked pleased and smug. Poor Mr Abzac, a portly, kindly man who had arrived in Australia from Poland just before the war, was trying to calm down those of us who had been allocated to Victoria. He told us that he himself lived in Victoria in a city called Melbourne, that it was a very nice city. It was not somewhere in the jungle; he was quite sure that we would all like it there. That was even more confusing. If Melbourne was where we would live, what then was Victoria? He patiently tried to allay most of our misgivings and succeeded in restoring some measure of confidence.

FEDERATION OF AUSTRALIAN JEWISH WELFARE SOCIETIES

EXECUTIVE SECRETARY:
W. L. BRAND

MACCABEAN HALL
146 DARLINGHURST ROAD
SYDNEY

Phones { FA 8184
FA 8185
FA 6257

CABLE & TELEGRAPHIC ADDRESS:
"WELFSOCY" SYDNEY

7th September, 1949.

Dear Miss Kopele,

This is to offer you welcome to Australia on behalf of my Executive, and it is our sincere hope that you will find your rehabilitation in this country to be easy and quick.

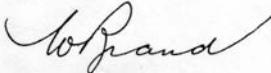
In accordance with the policy of the Australian Jewish Welfare Societies you have been allocated to the State of Victoria, , and the Welfare Society in that State will be at your service for advice and assistance if required.

I would point out that on your landing permit you have a slip stating the terms of your admittance into Australia and the trade you are to follow. It is necessary that you carry out the Government's instructions implicitly, as the law is very strict.

You will find in each State English classes so that you can rapidly learn the language of your new country, and we earnestly suggest that you make early contact with Jewish organisations. By doing this, you will find that you will assimilate very quickly to our local Jewish communities.

I have to inform you that my Board has decided that allocations made to the various States must be strictly enforced, and the person so allocated, in accordance with Government regulations, must remain in that State for a period of two years.

Yours sincerely,



W. L. BRAND,
Executive Secretary.

OFFICES:

SYDNEY—Australian Jewish Welfare Society, 146 Darlinghurst Rd., Darlinghurst, N.S.W.
MELBOURNE—Australian Jewish Welfare and Relief Society, 443 Little Collins St., Vic.
BRISBANE—Australian Jewish Welfare Society, 41 Linden Street, Dutton Park, Qld.
PERTH—Australian Jewish Welfare Society, 644 Hay Street, W.A.
ADELAIDE—Australian Jewish Welfare Society, 17 Davenport Terrace, Wayville, S.A.
HOBART—Hobart Hebrew Congregation, Synagogue, Argyle Street, Tas.

A letter of welcome from my sponsors

The last leg of the voyage from Fremantle to Melbourne was dreadful. We were on the Indian Ocean and huge waves battered our ship, mercilessly rocking it from one side to the other. At breakfast the bananas slid from one end of the table to the other and back again and it was impossible to walk without tottering or holding on to something. Worst of all was the sea sickness. Our cabin was airless and stuffy. It was impossible to sleep. I decided to sleep in the fresh air on the bare floor-boards on deck, as did many other people. It had its disadvantages, as the crew hosed down the decks at dawn regardless of whether anyone was sleeping there at the time.

The *Cyrenia* brought us safely to Victoria and berthed at Station Pier in the city of Melbourne, on a grey and cloudy morning. It was 17 September 1949, ten years and sixteen days since the beginning of World War II and the start of our troubles.

Everyone was out on deck for a glimpse of this new land, but I could not see the city. All I saw was a large crowd of people waving to one another, some holding bouquets of flowers, waiting for their relatives and friends to disembark. All at once, elation gave way to sadness. There was not one person in that crowd whom I knew or who would be waiting for me. With that realization, I felt no urgency to disembark and I felt sad and apprehensive at being friendless in a strange new land.

Eventually we found ourselves in an enormous hall where customs officers rummaged through a multitude of bags that stood on long benches. Inka, Hansi and I did not have much. All our possessions fitted into one wicker trunk and most of that was filled with baby rugs and old-fashioned cotton nappies. Nonetheless,

going through customs was a long procedure as there were so many passengers to process. The added problem that many migrants did not speak English did not help. It was getting late and Rosie, who was an eight-month-old baby, was tired and hungry. A volunteer from Jewish Welfare offered to take Inka and the children to the hostel where we would be staying while Hansi and I waited for our luggage and completed the formalities at customs.

It was evening when Hansi and I and the others finally arrived by a specially charted bus at the hostel owned by the Jewish Welfare Society. The hostel was situated in a large, old, double-storey, stately home at 818 Burke Road, Camberwell. There Inka met us, quite distraught, complaining that after all we had endured, we would be living in a commune again. She insisted that this was even worse than in Italy because here the women and children were separated from the men because there were only two large



The Migrant Hostel in 818 Burke Road, Camberwell 1949

dormitories. She was most unhappy, even though she had been told that this was only temporary. I on the other hand did not care. We were safely in our new country and I was looking forward with great anticipation to the next day and to my new life. Australia! A New Life! A New Beginning!

It was raining on my first morning in Australia. It was not a heavy rain but misty, soft drizzle. The scene bore no resemblance to the brochure that I had been given from the Australian Legation depicting a fair, sun-tanned, young woman picking oranges from a leafy citrus branch beneath a sun-drenched, blue sky.

After a breakfast of cereal and soft, white bread that had the texture of cotton wool (both of which were new to me), I went out and walked along Burke Road. It was my first walk on Australian soil. The pavement was wet and there were not many people about. I looked into the shop windows along the way. The shops were small; the window displays were, in most part, uninteresting except for the colourful display at the haberdasher's that caught my eye. I stopped to look at the array of aprons, doilies, skeins of coloured embroidery cotton, printed serviettes and tablecloths just waiting to be embroidered, as well as a large assortment of beautiful, brand-new knitting wool. I made myself a promise that I would spend some of my earnings in that shop when I got a job and had some money.

The shopkeeper was probably aware of the nearby hostel that housed new immigrants, and my appearance must have betrayed my immigrant status, for she came out of her shop and addressing me in Polish, asked where I had come from. She looked vaguely familiar but when she said that she also came from Lodz, I

recognized her as Mrs Kronenberg, the woman in the ghetto who had served at the depot where the monthly rations were distributed. She told me that she had arrived in Australia soon after the end of the war and she offered to answer any questions regarding my new country.

A Mr and Mrs Weksler managed the hostel where we stayed. Our sponsors not only provided us with accommodation but also with three meals a day. Many people came to visit the hostel. Friends of friends and newcomers who had arrived earlier offered valuable advice regarding jobs, housing, the various *Landsmanschaften* (mutual aid society) that could be of help, the culture, the language, and more.

Mrs Weksler informed us that certain food stuffs, like rice and tea could still only be obtained with food coupons, a leftover from the food restrictions of the war years. She told us that we would have to go to the city to get our coupons. She wrote the address of the relevant office on a piece of paper and gave us instructions about how to get there by tram. We were to get off at the Town Hall in Swanston Street and to walk from there to Russell Street, our destination.

It was a pleasant spring day, much more to my liking, on the day that I accompanied Hansi to the city in the capacity of spokesperson. We got the right tram and we got off at the right stop. All went well until at the corner of Swanston and Collins streets we were uncertain which direction to take to Russell Street. I remember standing beneath one of the many shady Elm trees that lined Collins Street near the Town Hall asking a gentleman in my best English for directions. He was a nice, friendly man

who tried to be of help and patiently explained the route to me. Unfortunately, I did not understand a single word of what he was saying although I pretended to. I thanked him, not wanting to waste more of his time. When I told Hansi that I could not understand the man's instructions, his comment was: 'All that time of learning English was just a waste'. I was hurt, embarrassed and confused. I could not understand what had happened. After some soul searching, it occurred to me that the man understood my question perfectly well but that it was I who did not understand him. I realised that it was the man's pronunciation that was at fault because it did not sound anything like the English pronunciation that I had been taught. The next person I asked spoke somewhat more clearly and we eventually got our coupons. When I related my predicament to people at the hostel, I was told of the Australian accent which sounded significantly different to the refined English one that I had learned. I was told I would soon get used to the sound of it. I felt much better about my English, and Hansi apologized. Indeed, it did not take me very long to get used to the sound of the Australian accent and I had no more communication problems.

A few days after our arrival, friends who had travelled on the *Cyrenia* with us came to visit and invited me to go with them to the pictures. After only a few days in Melbourne, they claimed to know their way about. The streets in Camberwell were lined with single-storey houses set in lovely flower gardens that looked all the same to me. We boarded the tram in Burke Road at a tram stop near a small, white church with a white steeple and we got off at a stop near the cinema.

I have no recollection whatsoever of what the film was about,

but I well remember the journey home. We boarded the tram and remembered to get off near the little white church. Looking out the window so as not to miss our stop, we passed many little houses with front gardens and as soon as we saw a little white church, we alighted. We walked for a while but the double-storey house where I lived had disappeared! After walking up and down the street without finding the house, we realised that we were utterly lost. We were in the wrong street and in the wrong area altogether but the houses, the front gardens and the little white churches all looked exactly the same, especially at night. It was nearly midnight and there were no trams running in Melbourne after twelve o'clock. Luckily, we were able to catch a tram back to the theatre where a friendly tram conductress, pointed us in the right direction and we managed to get the last tram home. I was escorted home safely, but my friends had to catch a taxi to where they lived.



Again, chance played its part in guiding and directing the course of my new life, just as it had done many times previously and my luck held. It had been a long, hard road that finally brought me to the shores of Australia.

This country which had been selected at random, like a lottery ticket, proved to be a haven. It accepted me as a migrant and a prospective citizen, was seminal in restoring my life to normality and in giving me the chance to exchange an uncertain future for one of stability. Within three months of my arrival, I had a paying job, had met some wonderful people who befriended me, had

fallen in love with the boy that I would eventually marry, and I even became the proud owner of a watch.

Utterly by chance, unexpectedly and by a strange set of circumstances, I received an offer of a job just five days after my arrival. I could never have dreamt of anything like it. It so happened that Inka and Hansi joined some of the new arrivals from the *Cyrenia* on a visit to the offices of our sponsors, the Australian Jewish Welfare and Relief Society, which was situated on the first floor of a grey, stone building at 443 Little Collins Street in the city. They were seeking direction, information and advice regarding job possibilities. They were also worried about eventual housing availability and were eager to learn about life in their new country. In addition, they wanted to see if they could get some money for their immediate needs.

I stayed behind at the hostel to babysit Giselle and Rosie. Inka was much happier when she returned. It was mostly good news that she had to impart. She had been assured that the situation regarding our accommodation at the Camberwell hostel was only temporary and that as soon as a room became available in one of the other hostels, we would be transferred. Jobs were easily obtainable although accommodation was more difficult to come by, particularly if there were small children in the family. In the meantime, all those who had gone to Jewish Welfare that morning had received one Australian pound to tide them over in the first instance. Unfortunately, because I was not there in person, they were unable to get the pound for me and I had to go there to claim it for myself.

The next morning, I made my way to the city and presented

myself at the offices of the AJW&RS. I detested the idea of having to ask for charity. Although I had been the recipient of it for the past four-and-a-half years, I had been spared the indignity of asking for it myself. Somehow I had always been lucky that it had been offered to me freely out of kindness by caring individuals or officially through the offices of the UNRRA and the Joint, and this had been somewhat less humiliating. Besides, we were displaced persons, destitute and had no other choice, so the indignity had to be borne under the circumstances. I had hoped that all that was behind me. I was disheartened, terribly nervous and very shy at having to ask for money. I really did not want to do it! This would have been the first time that I had to ask for a handout. Wishing for this ordeal to be over as quickly as possible and taking the stairs two at a time, I announced myself at the reception desk. I was shown into a dim, sunless room that was the manager's office. A tall, dark, broad-shouldered man in a grey suit and tie sat behind an oversized desk facing the door. He greeted me with a friendly smile and introduced himself as Mr Juno. He asked me many questions about myself and was particularly interested to hear about my wartime experiences in Poland. He mentioned that he also had originated from Poland but had lived in Australia for several years. We spoke in Polish. We chatted for a while, and among other things I mentioned that I had learned to speak English while in Italy. Eventually, I plucked up my courage and broached the subject and reason for my visit, saying that I had been told to come to pick up the pound that everyone else had received the previous day. He seemed very surprised at my request and said that I was misinformed, explaining that it was not the Society's

policy to give money to every new arrival as a right but rather it depended on their circumstances. The people who had come yesterday had families. Since I was single and lived in the hostel with my relatives, he had no option but to refuse my request. It had been a misunderstanding on the part of the people who sent me on this errand. He was apologetic, but he was reassuring regarding my future and wished me well in all my endeavours.

I got back to the hostel just before lunch and even before I managed to tell Inka about my unsuccessful visit, Mrs Weksler told me that there had been a telephone call for me from Jewish Welfare. They wanted me to ring them as soon as I came in. Hoping that they had had second thoughts about the money, I called back immediately. It was Mr Juno on the other end and he was offering me a temporary job for a week or so. He said that they were very much behind with filing because many migrants had arrived recently and their files had to be stored. The job was mine if I wanted it. He thought it would see me through until I found permanent employment. Should I be interested, I could come to work at 9 am the next morning. I was speechless with surprise and excitement, but I soon found my voice to thank him and assured him that I would be there.

On my arrival at work the next morning, I was introduced to all the staff and was overwhelmed by their interest and warmth towards me. Everyone was so friendly and caring, making me feel very welcome. The typists were girls more or less my own age and they were interested in me and my history. They showed me around the office and acquainted me with the custom of morning and afternoon tea breaks.

I was shown into one of four rooms along a passage. It was a very large room and there I was surprised and pleased to see Mrs Krynski, whom I knew from the ship, sitting at a typewriter. There was a huge pile of manila folders stored in boxes on the floor, and these had to be filed away in alphabetical order into the drawers of a green metal filing cabinet. I had a large desk of my own for sorting the files. I had been told that there was at least one week's work there when I began on Tuesday and it surprised me when after only two days, I was told not to come to work on Thursday. Naturally, I immediately thought that my work was unsatisfactory and that they did not want me anymore. I was disappointed. Later, however, it was explained that Thursday was to be a public holiday and that this meant that I had a day's leave. When I enquired as to the nature of this important holiday that was being celebrated by staying home from work for a whole day, I was told that the name of the holiday was Show Day and that it was celebrated each year on the third Thursday in September. When I asked what we would be celebrating the answer was something to do with sheep and cattle. I was quite perplexed. I had never heard of such a holiday and no amount of explaining could help me understand the nature of it.

I completed my task of filing much earlier than anticipated and on my last day, Mr Ziffer, who was the accountant, asked me if I would like to work for him in the accounts department. The girl who worked for him was leaving and he would need someone to replace her. I was pleased and flattered, but as much as I would have loved to work there, I had to decline, citing doubts about my abilities, my lack of education and especially my very basic knowledge of maths. 'I might make too many mistakes,' I explained. Mr Ziffer reassured me that everyone made mistakes

and, in any case, he would be there to supervise and teach me. He told me that I would be earning a junior wage of four pounds a week and each year as I got older, I would receive an increase until I came of age when I would be paid the adult wage. The question was, did I want the job? Would I like to try? He was very kind and encouraging and I had nothing to lose and a lot to gain. It was beyond belief. I had never thought of working in an office. I had no formal qualifications. Since the only alternative would have probably been for me to work in a factory, I jumped at the chance. At that moment, I silently expressed my deeply felt gratitude to Miss Julia Niemiera for wisely encouraging me to learn English.

It was a thrill to receive my first pay packet. It came in a small, sealed, brown envelope with my name written on it and beneath my name, my wages of £4 s d, less tax of 1s 3d. neatly underlined. The net wages were the princely sum of £3 18s 9d. It truly was an impressive sum of money for me. There were twenty shillings in every pound and twelve pence in every shilling. I could afford to indulge in an OK caramel-and-peanut confectionery bar that I had become quite fond of and which cost only 8d. I also discovered a delicious drink made of ice cream, lemonade and coloured flavouring that they called a Spider that cost 9d. If I really wanted to be extravagant, I bought a milk shake for 11d and still got change from a shilling. I could afford to buy a piece of Palmolive soap just for myself for only 9d. I felt truly rich. I will always be grateful to Mr Ziffer for his patience, for teaching me my job and for the chance that he gave me. He became my friend and mentor and always took an interest in my progress. My bosses enrolled me at Stotts College in Russell Street where I learned to type. I was very happy and very lucky.

Ships bringing new migrants to Australia were arriving frequently from all over Europe. Some of the passengers were sponsored by the Federation of Jewish Welfare Societies, so it was their responsibility to pick them up from the ship and assist them with customs. Usually it was Mr Fisher and Mr Ziffer and one of the typists who did that. But since I spoke English and some other languages, I was asked to join them.



Mr Fisher, Guta, and Mr. Gelman from the Warsaw Landsmanshaft at Station Pier welcoming Jewish Immigrants to Australia, 1950

Gola and Mietek Silberg were arriving from France by ship. They were friends of my friend Bebka, who had sponsored them. She asked me if I could be of assistance to them when I went to meet the ship one evening. I assured her that I would do my best. I found Gola and Mietek on the ship, welcomed them and gave them the good news of their friend's recent engagement to be married, news that they were happy to hear. They were delighted to meet someone who could speak Polish. They asked many questions

and we chatted pleasantly for a while and so began a long-lasting friendship that is treasured to this day.

It was very interesting work, helping people who did not speak English, who felt lost and needed so many answers to so many questions. When new arrivals finished with customs, we gathered our charges and helped them onto a charted bus that took them to the Camberwell hostel. Sometimes, after our duties were done, the ship's captain would invite us to join him for a meal on board ship.

The AJW&RS also administered an interest-free loan society to give newcomers a helping hand. It was a £100 loan to be repaid with weekly instalments of £2.10s. To obtain it they needed five guarantors (as well as a good reason of course). Many new arrivals took advantage of this service, which helped them initially. With time, I advanced to become the cashier and bookkeeper of the loan society assisting Mr Ziffer.



Guta at her work desk

Because I was often at the port, I also helped the Italian migrants with their queries. Eventually I became known to the customs officers, who were always in need of an interpreter. Some of those problems were not only related to language but misunderstandings related to the different cultures and different perspectives. For example, a family had brought with them their bedding, goose-down quilts and pillows, their most prized possessions, and they were told on arrival that they could not bring them into the country. They had to leave their bedding behind because it had to go through quarantine. Panic! They could not understand or speak English. Pandemonium! The customs officer tried to explain to them in English that they would get their bedding back in a week or so, but all that they knew was that their bedding had been taken from them. That was when I was asked to help explain the situation.

I particularly remember a sad story about a young man from Italy who brought a large salami sausage with him which was confiscated at customs. Food items are forbidden imports to Australia. He did not know a word of English and could not understand why the salami was taken from him. The customs officer was trying to explain the situation to no avail. I was asked to explain the problem to the young man in Italian. He was crestfallen. He told me that he came from a very small village in Italy, that the salami was a parting gift for his journey to Australia from all the people of his village insuring that he would not go hungry. I told his story to the customs officer, who sympathized but that was the law and neither of us could do anything about it. Whenever I recall that story I wonder, and hope, that the boy had succeeded to make a very happy and successful life for himself in Australia.



Six weeks after our arrival we were transferred from the Camberwell hostel to another hostel in Drummond Street, North Carlton, which was in reality only a large, single-storey brick family house that had been converted into temporary accommodation. It housed some eight or nine families, one family per room. There was a large kitchen for communal use equipped with the necessary cooking utensils: a stove, an ice chest and a large wooden table.

Inka, Hansi and the children shared a room and I was assigned to the sunroom, which I could only access through the window of their room. The sunroom was partitioned using a thin sheet of plywood, and the part that had the door was occupied by two teenage children of another family, who very early on Sunday mornings played the piano-accordion and sang to amuse themselves, just when I had the desire to sleep in.

My room was very small with a bed, a shelf and a night lamp, but it afforded me a view of the garden when I woke and allowed me the freedom of keeping the light on so that I was able to read late into the night. I had been reading *Gone with the Wind* at the time, which I enjoyed immensely. I found it hard to put down. I would be reading until three in the morning and consequently found it hard to wake up in time for work.

The rooms were furnished with beds, a table and chairs and a cot for the baby but there was no bedding or linen provided and we did not possess any of these items. On a rainy Saturday morning, all five of us went to the city on a shopping expedition to buy some

of the basic household items that we needed. We found Chandlers, a department store in Flinders Street several steps below street level, (long gone now), where we bought some magenta-coloured, cotton-filled quilts, bed linen, towels, some crockery and cutlery. How pleased we were with our new acquisitions, especially since we had bought them with money that we had earned. Hansi had a job as a fitter-and-turner and he received the basic wage that brought him £7 a week. Together with my £4, the family had £11, less tax to live on. It was a start.

There were several continental delicatessen shops in Carlton where European food, familiar to our palette, was available. Freshly baked, delicious, rye bread that tasted just like the bread at home before the war was available at Goldberg's Bakery. Inka would order the weekly groceries and delicatessen items on Fridays and when the cardboard boxes in which the order had been delivered were unpacked, the table would be covered with food. There was an assortment of continental sausage, cheese, butter, pickles, sour cream, cream cheese and other delicacies, too many to list, and all this food cost more, or less, £1. It was the first time in years that food was available and affordable.

I lived within walking distance of the tram stop that was at the corner of Richardson and Lygon streets. The tram took me all the way to the city and the price of the fare was 3d. Not long after we moved to Carlton, there was a tram strike that lasted a few days. Every morning people would queue at the tram stop in a civilized and orderly manner and wait for a lift and anyone who happened to be driving past would stop and pick up passengers who were going in their direction. No one pushed in front of anyone else.

The people who stopped were pleased to be able to help and no driver was afraid to give anyone a lift.

In accordance with government regulations, I had to remain in the state to which I had been allocated for a period of two years; therefore, I was required to present myself fairly frequently at the offices of the Immigration Department in the city in order to prove that I had not left Victoria and to let them know each time I changed my address. Mr Meyer, who always wore a hat, a three-piece suit and a tie, was in charge of that particular department. He was a friendly man and ready to help the migrants who came for advice. He also spoke German. Since I was a frequent visitor to the department, he got to know me and offered me a job in the Immigration Department as an interpreter. He was telling me that they were desperate for English-speaking migrants. I refused out of loyalty to my then-employers who had sponsored me and had been so kind and helpful. He made the offer many times and said that I could have the job if I ever changed my mind.

On one of those visits to the Immigration Department, while I waited in a queue to be served, I felt – rather than saw – someone's eyes on me. When I turned, I saw a young, well-dressed, pretty woman with strikingly beautiful green eyes looking at me intensely. Those eyes were familiar but I could not remember where I had seen them before. As I struggled with my memory trying to place that face, she called my name and asked, 'Don't you recognise me?' At that instant I recognized Edzia, a friend from the concentration camp in Meltheuer, Germany, to whom I had said goodbye when we left Hof after liberation nearly five years before. We hugged and kissed and were both pleased and amazed to have found each other on the other side of the world. I told her where we lived and

she came to visit us the following Saturday afternoon with her handsome husband, Adam. It was a great reunion. We caught up with news and they told us that they had come to Australia on a government contract and were housed for a while at the hostel at Bonegilla. In December of 1949, on Inka's birthday Hansi and I had bought her a Tissot watch as a birthday gift and had it engraved. We celebrated with afternoon tea in the backyard of the hostel with Edzia and Adam as our guests.

A migrant has much to learn aside from the language, before he can adapt and feel at home in his adopted country. Hansi experienced this just before Christmas of that year on the day when the factory where he worked closed for the summer holidays. He usually came home from work at five o'clock, but on that day there was no sign of him. Inka was frantic and even the people at the hostel were worried. It was past six o'clock and he still had not come home. We stood in front of the house anxiously scanning the street. It was nearly seven o'clock in the evening when we heard the sound of horse's hooves and the rattling of a wagon wheels before we saw the baker's cart come into view and stop in front of our hostel. Out of the cart staggered Hansi as white as a sheet and very apologetic. He told us the story of what he had learnt about the Australian custom of drinking in the pub. He said that he had been invited by all his workmates, and there were quite a few of them, to join them for a drink in the pub after work. He accepted, pleased that he had been asked. His English was non-existent. He had never heard of the local custom of 'shouting' and having to drink as many drinks as there were people, and that a drink was not just one drink. The celebration ended with the closure of the pub at

6 pm, which was the law at the time, and Hansi, a little worse for wear, finally left for home. As he walked from the tram stop, the baker saw him and very kindly brought him home.



My job was interesting and varied and so were the people with whom I worked. There was Mr Juno, the manager, who came to Australia before the war from Poland and Mr Fisher, the secretary, who managed to escape his native Austria to Shanghai, where he supported himself by playing the piano in a bar, and from there arrived in Melbourne to join his wife, who was working as a secretary at the Warburton Chalet. He then joined the Australian home army during the war.



*Guta, Mr. Ziffer, Clare, Mr. Fisher, Madelaine and Mrs. Krynski
at Clair's Engagement Party, 1949*

Mr Ziffer, the accountant who was a law student in his native Germany, was interned in Dachau and was permitted to leave on condition that his father pay a ransom for his release. He ended up in Shanghai where he lived for the duration of the war. He met and married a refugee from Czechoslovakia and together they arrived in Australia after the war. His family in Germany did not survive.

Miss Frieda Cohn was one of the stenographers. She used to be the personal secretary to a highly regarded professor in Berlin before she was made to leave her native Germany. She came to Australia to relatives who had sponsored her. She considered it quite a comedown to be a stenographer working for a refugee organization. She never let that be forgotten.

Mr Jacque Bachrach was an Austrian film director who escaped to England and was sent to Australia on the *Duneera* as an enemy alien and was interned in Tatura, Victoria. He was a highly educated, intelligent, but a sad and lonely man who never recovered from this ordeal. He was in charge of the search department; everyone was trying and hoping to find relatives.

Mrs Krynski, who was Polish, survived the war in Russia with her husband and elderly mother. She was a typist and I worked with her in the same room. She was a vivacious, thirty-something woman with brown eyes and blonde hair, tall and slightly overweight. Sana Krynski spoke Polish, Russian, Yiddish and English. She was a heavy smoker and was trying very hard to diet. She munched on dry biscuits and lettuce at lunchtime while I brought delicious sausage and pickle-filled rye bread sandwiches for my lunch.

I had learned to smoke on board ship but only if and when I was

offered a cigarette. I was not a serious smoker. Mrs Krynski and I had an arrangement: we traded one of my sandwiches for one of her cigarettes. We laughed a lot. I enjoyed her company. She was good fun and had a great sense of humour. It was a sad day when, on the day of her birthday in January, Sana Krynski was run over by a car while crossing Dandenong Road on the way to the milk bar to buy some cigarettes. She tragically died from her injuries.

Madeleine started working in the office as a receptionist and telephonist. She had just arrived from Belgium with her parents and younger sister. She came to Australia to marry a boy she had met in Brussels but who now lived in Melbourne. Madelaine was a very sophisticated girl, worldly, self-assured and beautifully dressed. Very French. She spoke English with a genuine French accent. I must admit that I was a little in awe of her at first. She was my age but seemed so much more mature. We became firm friends the day we walked together, returning from Mrs Krynski's funeral. We struck up a conversation and found that we enjoyed each other's company. I found her intelligent and interesting. Madelaine became one of my dearest friends. She invited me to her wedding, which was in the European, cabaret-style. Her guests were seated at table-cloth-covered round tables. Dinner was served by waiters and there was a band and dancing.

The Australian-born shorthand typists were girls my own age and they also befriended me. An instant friendship developed between me and Leah Sokol, who was particularly friendly and kind to me. She was engaged to be married, and before her wedding, she invited me to her hen's party. I was not familiar with the custom or with the term, so I told some people in the office that

I was invited to Leah's chicken party and I could not understand the merriment I caused. Leah had invited a few of her girlfriends and me for dinner at the Florentino in Bourke Street. This was a very elegant restaurant at the time. I cannot remember what was served for the main meal but I never forgot the desert of banana fritters, one more thing that I'd never heard of nor tasted before and I must admit that they were not to my taste. It was my first formal outing since my arrival in Australia and I enjoyed the evening very much.

I was very happy at my work place. The atmosphere was pleasant and relaxed. Everyone was friendly and tried to make me feel welcome. I had arrived in Melbourne not knowing a soul and very soon I forged some lasting, wonderful friendships.



There is a small box somewhere at the bottom of my drawer containing a tarnished ladies wristwatch. The watch is old. It stopped working and lost its usefulness years ago. It lost its shine but not its association with a particular time in my life. This old, now-useless item was my most-treasured, first watch, bought from the wages earned at my first job in my new country. A watch those days was an expensive item of jewellery. It was considered a luxury.

Shortly after I began work, a travelling salesman came to the office selling watches, among other things. I fell in love with a beautiful, shiny watch from his collection. It had a small gold face and a narrow gold band and it cost 6£. I had never owned a watch and I wanted one so much. But I had no money with which to buy it.

Everyone with whom I worked was very kind and caring and

sympathised with me. Mr Ziffer, my immediate boss, offered to advance me the money on account of my wages but he advised me to have the watch looked at by a jeweler before I bought it. Mr Ziffer was a very nice person, a kind and decent human being. Maybe having been a migrant himself he understood the predicaments that people could find themselves in and the problems that they sometimes had to face in starting a new life from scratch in a new country. I took the watch to the jeweler a few doors from our office building, who examined the watch and approved of it. I gratefully accepted Mr Ziffer's offer of the loan and bought the watch immediately and wore it at once. I was ecstatic, and everyone was happy for me. I repaid 10s towards my debt every week as soon as I received my pay until it was paid off. The money was never taken out of my pay automatically. I often recall this act of kindness and I am grateful for this trust in me. I have had other, perhaps more valuable, watches since, but none has been as precious as this particular timepiece, a memento of the beginning of a new chapter in my life.

At that time there was a long waiting period to have a telephone installed. On the other hand, jobs were plentiful. There were not enough people to run the various, newly developing industries and factories. Skilled and unskilled workers were in great demand. Many migrants took the opportunity of the job availabilities and worked on two jobs or worked overtime. Only doctors and lawyers with European degrees were unable to practise their profession and were obliged to find other occupations. The price of a cottage in Carlton or Brunswick was between £500 and £1,000. If one had enough money for a deposit, the rest could be paid off in small

instalments. The basic wage at the time was 7£ a week for men, less for women. My wage as an under-age female was 4£.

People dressed formally in those days. Ladies wore hats and gloves, be it winter or summer, so did school children as part of their school uniform. Men wore hats, sports jackets or suits. It was unthinkable for a man not to wear a tie. Many an establishment barred men from their premises if they did not wear one.

Although speaking in a foreign language in public and being unable to speak English was frowned upon, people were generally friendly and very polite. I remember how impressed I was by the politeness and good manners around me. Everyone thanked the bus driver when leaving the bus, for example, or formed a queue and waited their turn to be served. A quaint custom that I rather liked was that of a boy giving a girl a corsage of flowers if he was taking her out for a date and she would then proudly wear it pinned to her dress. Then there were always chocolates at interval at the theatre or the pictures. Scorched almonds were very popular in red oblong boxes. It made one feel very special.

Women did their knitting on the tram while travelling to work. I was fascinated by the speed with which their needles, fingers and wool moved simultaneously. Once I even saw a woman shell her peas for dinner while travelling home from work on the train. That was clever economising of time. Bread and ice were delivered to the door by horse and cart; the postman delivered mail twice daily as well as on Saturday mornings. One could always be sure that it was the middle of the night by the clip-clop sound of the milkman's horse and the clatter of milk bottles which were left outside the door. Money for the milk was left in the empty bottles the next day and no one stole it.

There was only one continental restaurant at the time that many newcomers frequented. The restaurant was known as Hoddles and was situated in the basement of a city building in Little Collins Street near the corner of Elizabeth Street. They served a very nice Italian, three-course dinner for only 1s and 6d. There was always a very long queue outside of Hoddles at about 6 pm. After queuing for half an hour or more, one eventually got a table; however, the rule was to eat and run because others were waiting for that table in the queue outside.

Gibby's opposite St. James Cinema in Bourke Street was the only coffee lounge that served real coffee, but there was always a long queue outside that establishment, particularly on Saturday nights. To be at the end of the queue while it was nearing midnight meant that while you were still drinking your coffee, the waitress would unceremoniously begin piling chairs onto the empty tables, and sometimes even start mopping the floor, which was not a very subtle hint that it was time to leave, ready or not.

It was just about a 'must' to go to the pictures in the city on Saturday nights. Tickets had to be booked in advance, the latest on Monday, to secure good seats. For only 1s 6d, one saw the weekly newsreel, a cartoon or two and two feature films. In the auditorium at interval, a young woman sold cigarettes and ice cream from a tray that she carried on a neck halter. People usually dressed up for these outings. It often happened that a lady wearing a large hat could interfere with your line of vision if she happened to sit in front of you. It would have been unthinkable for her to take it off. It was also traditional to go out for supper after the pictures on Saturday nights.

The two tallest buildings then, and the pride of Melbourne, were the Manchester Unity building at the corner of Collins and Swanston streets and the T&G Building at Collins and Russell streets. Green, double-decker buses travelled along Bourke Street passing the Myer Emporium, the best-known department store. The price of the fare was 2d and what fun it was to travel on the top deck.

An ugly, very large, wooden structure stood on the site of the present Art Centre complex in St. Kilda Road near the river. It was, unlike today, a disreputable part of Melbourne. It was a dance hall they called the Trocader, and was frequented mainly by sailors of all nationalities, who in the days when many ships berthed at the Port of Melbourne and Station Pier, descended on Melbourne on Saturday nights.

And then there were Sundays when nothing happened. Shops were closed, as were cinemas, pubs and cafés, restaurants, cabarets and petrol stations. No newspapers were available on Sundays and no official sports of any kind were played on a Sunday. One could drive out to the country for a picnic if one had a car. Ferntree Gully was still considered the countryside where there was a native animal sanctuary. Another nice Sunday outing was a drive to Station Pier to see the grand, white passenger ships arrive or leave with coloured streamers linking them to people on the shore. Sometimes these ships allowed visitors on board and that was a treat.



I met Eva shortly after my arrival in Melbourne and as soon as we met, we became instant friends. We were introduced by a mutual friend, a shipmate of mine who had mentioned her to me during our voyage from Europe to Australia. She was the first friend I made in Australia. She had a zest for life and a great sense of fun, yet her outlook was mature beyond her years. She was two years my senior, a tall, good-looking girl with large dark brown eyes, long black hair that reached well past her waist, full lips and a cheerful smile that made dimples in her cheeks. Most importantly, she was a wise and caring friend. We had a lot in common. We were both Polish so we shared the language. We had both lived in Italy before we came to Australia and shared that language, and both of us happened to live in Carlton two short blocks from one



*Ewa and Guta at the Melbourne Botanical Gardens listening
to Music for the People, 1949*

another. Eva lived in a boarding house in Drummond Street at the corner of Fenwick Street with her sister and brother-in-law. The boarding house where Eva lived also housed several other newly arrived migrant families. One of these was a couple by the name of Brett with their newborn baby girl, Lilly. The same Lilly who, when she grew up, became a well-known Australian writer.

As Eva and I lived in such close proximity, we saw each other daily. After work, we would walk back and forth between each other's houses discussing life's mysteries, our past and our hopes for the future. We had wonderful conversations about life in general and the new country that from now on we were going to call home. There was much to learn. We visited the botanical gardens and discovered and enjoyed the wonderful musical event called Music for the People that was performed there in summer on Saturday afternoons, much before the Myer Music Bowl was built.

Eva attended English classes a few evenings a week. She would tell me about the people she met there who were all young, new arrivals and, in particular, she spoke about a boy whom she said was so very nice and whom she wanted me to meet one day. I was always wary of people trying to introduce me to boys. I was very shy and altogether not very fond of meeting strangers. I did not express much enthusiasm at the prospect.

One day she rang me at work (there was no telephone in the hostel) to tell me that the boy whom she had mentioned would be visiting her that evening and she wanted me to come to her house to meet him. I was distraught about it. I truly did not want to go there to meet a boy. I agonized about it all day at work and so when I got home, I offered to babysit the little girls if their parents

would like to go to the pictures. Of course, they jumped at the idea. I was pleased with myself. Good idea! Problem solved. I did not give it another thought except that I could not let Eva know that I was not coming, as neither she nor I had access to a telephone. Inka and Hansi went off to the pictures and I put the children to bed. Fortunately, they went to sleep without making too much fuss, which they very often did, especially baby Rosie. I dimmed the light, only one globe over the table, and sat down to read – always my favourite pastime. I was enjoying my book when there was a knock on the door. I did not expect anyone; besides we hardly knew a soul. It was probably a neighbor, I thought, a little annoyed. I answered the door and there was my friend Eva with two young men, saying that she presumed that I was unable to come so she had brought her visitors to my place. I was apprehensive and more than a little uncomfortable about the gloomy room and my role as hostess.

The introductions were performed in low whispers because the children were asleep and the room was in semi-darkness for that reason. We sat around the table and, surprisingly, the conversation flowed effortlessly, as Eva was a good conversationalist and so was the boy whom Eva wanted me to meet. He was particularly friendly, natural and so charming, easy-going and witty that I was enchanted and forgot all about my shyness, the shabby room and the children sleeping in their cots. The name of the boy was Ludwik, Ludek to his friends. His friend's name was Natek, short for Natan.

We spoke about our recent past, as most Holocaust survivors did in those days when they first met. We spoke of our lost homes, our murdered parents and siblings and other family members. We spoke of the places where we were born and lived until the war,

and what fate had befallen each one of us during that war. We told of our voyages to Australia, the names of the ships on which we had arrived, sea sickness, of our arrival and the length of our stay in Australia. Ludek kept us amused with anecdotes of all kinds and made us laugh. He had smiling blue eyes and wavy brown hair. He was four years older than me. Ludek was born in Krakow, Poland, the younger of two boys. He was thirteen years old at the outbreak of the war and had lost all his family. Although he had no relatives in Australia he had many friends. No wonder. He was very likeable.

The evening passed so very pleasantly and before the visit was over, I was in love with a most wonderful human being with kind, smiling, somewhat mischievous blue eyes. As my visitors were leaving and we were saying goodbye, his lovely blue eyes spoke volumes as they met mine over the heads of our friends and it seemed as if there were only the two of us framed in the open doorway. No words were uttered except a polite goodnight.

The next day I had a phone call at work and an invitation from Ludek to the pictures to see *The Heiress* with Olivia de'Haviland and Montgomery Clift, at the very impressive State Theatre in Flinders Street where the ceiling imitated the night sky, full of sparkling stars. This was an invitation that I happily accepted.

Again, as during my life until then, my good fortune followed me. He and I were born in the same country; we had landed in Italy after the war, he in the south and I in the north. It took a long voyage to the other side of the world for us to meet. I feel certain that it was predestined! That is how I met the love of my life. He was the best thing that ever happened to me. Eva was delighted when I rang and told her about my date. I am quite convinced this was meant to be and my friend Eva was Fate's chosen messenger.

L U D E K
P A R T F O U R

4



Ludek recently liberated aged 19, 1945

Ludwik, known as Ludek, was born to Regina and Leon Goldstein in the royal city of Kraków, the old capital of Poland, on 26 July 1926. He was the younger of two boys. His elder brother, Alfred, known as Fredek or Fredziu, was four years his senior.

Regina, Ludek's mother, was a spirited, warm-hearted, considerate woman. She was the eldest of seven siblings who all adored and greatly respected her.

Unfortunately, she suffered ill health all through her adult life. This was a result of an accident in her youth when a heavy brass weight fell onto her foot, which caused a bone to splinter, detach itself and lodge in her body. Thereafter, she suffered from osteomyelitis that caused frequent infections and often resulted in hospital stays.

Ludek's father, Leon, was part owner of The Royale, a well-known coffee lounge in Kraków situated in the vicinity of the Wawel Castle at Świętej Gertrudy 29, next to the Hotel Royal, which still functions as a restaurant today. Leon worked long hours and most of the time when he came home from work, his children were already asleep. Every morning, however, when the boys awoke, there was always a treat on the bedside table left for them by their father. Never once did their father fail to leave something for them: a chocolate, a nice cake or some other sweet. Ludek was so sure of his treat that he reached for it before he even woke up properly. He was never disappointed.

Leon was a kind and charitable person. He never failed to stop and give a beggar some coins (and neither did Ludek when he grew up). He often collected money for some needy family but did it with discretion and tact and never disclosed the name of the recipients

so as not to cause them embarrassment. Sometimes Ludek would accompany his father on his walks and was very proud to see how respectfully his father was greeted by the many people they met on their way. Ludek was always introduced to whomever his father happened to meet.

Leon served in the Austrian army and he saw active combat during World War I. (At that time this part of Poland was part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire.) He was wounded in battle and as a result of that injury, he suffered bad headaches for the rest of his life.

The family employed a woman by the name of Anda Telega, who helped with the housework and the care of the children when they were small. Ludek often recalled that when she washed his face she washed it upwards and her hand always got caught under his nose. Anna was considered part of their extended family because at one time or another she also worked for Ludek's aunts and other relations.

Ludek had smiling blue eyes, fair skin and wavy brown hair. When he was a child he was nicknamed Czerwone Jabłuszko, Little Red Apple, because of his rosy complexion. He was a bright boy, good-natured, very lively and a little mischievous. He was well liked by everyone and a particular favourite of his maternal uncles Emil and Edek. He loved dogs and they loved him back. He kept his pet white mice in the space between the double windows in his parents' flat and at one time he also kept a praying mantis there, but thankfully not at the same time as the mice. He also collected all kinds of things and his pockets were full of 'useful items' such as bits of string, pebbles, marbles, and pieces of coloured glass. These treasures made holes in his pockets but if his brother and

his friends needed any bits and pieces, Ludek was always ready to share. He was a lovable, generous and considerate boy.

Already at an early age, he liked to kick a ball around and play soccer in the courtyard with his little friends. However, he often accidentally kicked balls into someone's shop window and more than once his father had to pay for the damage caused. Ludek was a vivacious, energetic boy who was hard on his clothes and shoes. His father was known to say that it was cheaper to feed him than to clothe him.

His maternal grandparents, Wolf and Julia Asznowicz, lived in Jaworzno, a small township known for its coalmines. It was situated 56 kilometres from Kraków, which in those days was considered far. Sometimes Ludek would be sent there by bus to visit them.



Ludek's grandparents Julia and Wolf Asznowitz

His grandfather loved and welcomed him, and as custom dictated, Ludek kissed his hand as a mark of respect to his elders. Ludek was always thinking up some interesting activity that inevitably would get him into some mischief. He liked to climb trees and he loved fruit and could not resist picking it. He used to say that no fruit tasted as good as that picked straight from a tree. Of course, the owners of the orchard or a particular tree did not take kindly to his escapades. It was said that his grandfather's neighbours were quite pleased when Ludek's visit came to an end and he went back home.

Ludek loved the cinema and especially movies about cowboys and Indians. Luckily, his family had some relatives who owned a cinema in Będzin, a town not far from Kraków. Whenever he visited there with his parents, he was allowed to spend the entire day in the cinema watching the same movie, which in those days ran continuously. He considered these visits a very special treat. He even ate his lunch there, which was brought to him by his mother.

Ludek's uncle Emil, his mother's brother, also lived in Jaworzno. Uncle Emil used to visit Kraków quite often and whenever he did, he stayed at the Goldstein home. Ludek would give up his bed to his uncle and was relegated to sleep in the bathtub where his mother improvised a bed by lining the bath with eiderdown quilts. Ludek said that he did not mind because he liked his uncle, who used to take him to the circus or the merry-go-round, and when he was older, gave him some spending money.

One day when Ludek was about six or seven years old, his uncle Emil arrived in Kraków on a day when a big parade was in progress. It was pouring rain. Uncle Emil crossed Plac Matejki, one of the city squares in the centre of which stood a very large monument commemorating the battle of Grunwald. The structure

was some two storeys high and at the very top was a statue of King Matejko, one of the kings of Poland, sitting astride a horse. Suddenly he heard someone calling, ‘Uncle! Uncle!’ Emil did not know from whence the voice came but he recognized the tone and looking up, noticed Ludek sitting on the horse next to the king, holding on with one hand while waving excitedly to his uncle with the other. The way that Emil related the story was that he nearly had a heart attack when he saw Ludek up there, so worried was he that the child would fall off the slippery wet statue. According to Ludek’s version of the story, standing on the pavement meant that his view of the parade was blocked by the towering adults. Climbing up to the top of the statue was the only way that he could watch the parade.

Ludek began stamp collecting at a young age and by the age of thirteen he had a sizeable collection. He had a quick mind, a natural gift for mathematics and a great sense of humour. He liked poetry and could recite it superbly. With perfect delivery and timing, he would recite by heart long pieces of *Pan Tadeusz* by the Polish bard, Adam Mickiewicz, as well as some very comical monologues.

He liked to tag along after his big brother, which was not always appreciated by Fredziu, who did not want his little brother



*The Grunwald Monument
in Plac Matejki, Krakow*

following, especially when he was with his own friends. But Ludek, always a resourceful little boy, would cross the road and pretend to be going someplace else but on the same route. Very often his brother's friends interceded on Ludek's behalf because they liked this lovable character and enjoyed his company.

The family lived in an apartment at Ulica Krzywa 11 in Kraków. Ludek loved the city of his birth and knew every nook and cranny. He was proud of its history, its old buildings, the Wawel Castle and the Wisla River, where he taught himself to swim. He knew every monument and the name of every street.

Wojciecha was the name of the primary school that Ludek attended. Though a bright child, he did not like to study too much. 'He is doing well but with a little more effort on his part he could be doing so much better' was the refrain that his parents had to endure. At the age of twelve he was enrolled at the Hebrew *Gimnazium* (high school) at Ulica Miodowa. He passed the entrance exam and was admitted. There he learned Hebrew and excelled in mathematics and Polish. In June 1939 he finished the first year of high school and during the summer holidays in July, he celebrated his thirteenth birthday and his bar mitzvah. To mark the occasion, he received a pocket watch on a chain from his grandfather. This gift became his treasured possession.

Two months into his thirteenth year and just when he was preparing to begin his second year of high school, World War II broke out. On 1 September 1939 Germany declared war on Poland. Within a week, Poland was overrun by the Germans and Hitler's war on the Jews began. Anti-Jewish laws and persecutions of Jews were immediately implemented.

As a result of the Ribbentrop-Molotov Pact in 1939, Poland was divided between Germany and Russia. Many Jewish families, and particularly single young Jewish men, tried to flee the German-occupied part and an exodus towards Russian-occupied Poland began. Seventeen-year-old Fredek, still a student studying graphics, and his friend Samek Mond left their respective homes and fled to the East. Ludek's uncle Emil, with his wife, Helena, his young son, Richard, and his wife's young sister, Natka, joined the exodus and survived the war in Russia.

The Jewish population of Kraków, like all over occupied Poland, was immediately subjected to anti-Jewish laws. Jews were made to wear a visible, identifiable sign on the outside of their garments. In Kraków the Jews were made to wear a white armband with a blue Star of David on their right arm. Failure to do so was punishable by immediate death. Jewish businesses were confiscated and if Jews lived in the centre of the city, they had to vacate their homes, leaving the furniture and most of their valuable possessions behind. They had to declare their assets, hand in their jewellery, furs, carpets, silver and stamp collections. They were prohibited from using public benches, from frequenting schools and universities; they were prohibited from entering the city's parks, walking onto the main city square, riding on trams or travelling on trains. They were deprived of a thousand and one liberties that were the right of every other citizen. Jews were deprived not only of their civil rights but also of their human rights, and eventually their right to live.

Ludek's seventy-two-year-old grandfather had to walk the 56 kilometres from his home in Jaworzno to see his three daughters and their families, who lived in Kraków, because there was no other



*Ludek with his parents, Regina and Leon Goldstein
in occupied Krakow, November 1940*

possibility to communicate with them and he worried about them.

Ludek, frustrated and defiant, sometimes took off his armband and put it in his pocket so that he could walk around his beloved city. Had he met anyone who knew him and recognized him and had a mind to report him, he could have been shot on the spot. It was an exercise fraught with danger, but he was young and foolhardy.

Leon's business was taken over by an Aryan manager and Leon was only allowed to work there as a waiter. In the winter of 1940, all Jews living anywhere in the city of Kraków were ordered to leave their places of residence. Kraków was to be *judenrein*, free of Jews. Ludek and his parents were also made to leave their apartment in the centre of town. They moved into a one-room dwelling that had no kitchen and no bathroom, was situated on the first floor at No.6 Podbrzezie Street on the outskirts of the city. Only Jews who were performing work that the Germans deemed necessary received special permission to stay.

On 21 November 1940 Leon applied for permission to commute to Kraków in order to keep his job. On 22 February 1941 he received a reply that permission had been denied. Instead, he received a deportation order. They were to move

Antragsteller nach Adressbuch:	
Ergänzungsbogen	
zur Erfassung der jüdischen Bevölkerung der Stadt Krakow	
Postleitziffer <u>38</u> Name <u>Leon (Ludek) Ludek</u> Wohnort <u>Krakow, Podbrzezie 6</u>	
Dieser Ergänzungsbogen ist für jede im Haushaltsgemenge aufgeführte Person mit vollendendem 14. Lebens-Jahr auszufüllen.	
1. Familiennummer: <u>Podbrzezie 6</u>	
1a) Personen aus dem Haushalt: <u>Leopold Ludek</u>	
1b) Personen aus dem Haushalt: <u>Leopoldina Ludek</u>	
2. geboren am <u>25.10.1888</u>	
3. Geburtsort: <u>Lissa</u>	
4. Eltern: verh., erw., geschieden, <u>verheiratet</u>	
5. meiste Wohnung: <u>Ort: Krakow</u>	
6. Telefon: <u>1 Stockwerk, Tel Nr. 6</u>	
Vorher, jetzt oder später Mit wem will Sie in Krakow <u>leben</u> ?	
8. Arbeitsstelle: <u>Kaufladen (Leopold Ludek)</u>	
7. Sind Sie selbst berufstätig? ja/nein? Wissen ja: a) Welchen Unternehmens, Gewerbe oder Gewerbe betreiben Sie?	
b) Wie befindet sich das Geschäft? c) Fabrikation oder Verkauf? d) Klein- oder Großhandlung? e) Other Lohn?	
f) Werden Arbeitsmänner benötigt?	
g) Wieviel Arbeitsmänner benötigt?	
h) Arbeitgeber: Name <u>Leopold Ludek</u> erlich Arbeiter: Name <u>Leopold Ludek</u> erlich	
g) Wie hoch war der letzte Monatslohn? h) Wie hoch war der Vierteljahrsmonatslohn Jan./März 1940?	
Aussiedlungsanweisung Datum <u>22.02.1941</u> Ort <u>27.03.1941</u>	

Questionnaire and deportation order, 1941

to Podgórze, the place where the ghetto was later established, or to leave for any of the outlying small towns and townships. Kraków was now free of Jews.

Before they left, Ludek still managed to sell his beloved stamp collection, which was of course *verboten* (forbidden), rather than let the Germans have it. Luckily, he got away with it and was very pleased with himself. The family took the few possessions they still had, as well as their photographs and letters, and moved to the small town of Niepołomice about 30 kilometres from Kraków at the edge of the area of the great forests. There they rented a dwelling and were eventually joined by his grandparents from Jaworzno and his mother's youngest siblings, Uncle Moniek and Aunt Genia. As it was prohibited for Ludek to attend school, and his father was worried about him being idle, he arranged with a local Polish cabinetmaker to teach Ludek the art of French polishing. Ludek went to the workshop for a few hours every day and he enjoyed learning the process of mixing the various components of the polishing agent.

In June 1941 Germany declared war on Russia and overran the eastern part of Poland. The border was now open. Fredziu was homesick and having been away from home for two years, decided to return. While he was in Russia he had attended a teachers seminary in Rochatyn. Although he found it very difficult to support himself, he nevertheless managed to return home with a teaching diploma. Ludek, who came home from his French polishing workshop, found a tall stranger sitting at the table with his parents. He greeted their guest politely, not recognizing his brother, who had gone away as a seventeen-year-old boy and had

come back a young man. Ludek was a little in awe of Fredziu at first but overjoyed to see his brother again.

Life in the provinces seemed somewhat easier, although all the anti-Jewish laws applied but at least there were not so many German soldiers about. The situation changed rapidly in the summer of 1942 when the SS and SA troops surrounded the town of Niepołomice and ordered all the Jewish population to assemble at the edge of the forest. Leon Goldstein gave each of his sons some money, then bundled up all the important papers, letters, photographs and a sum of money and hid the bundle behind the kitchen dresser. They each took a rucksack with their things already packed and left. Regina's parents, her brother and her younger sister joined them. Together the family walked to the edge of the forest, joining the many thousands of people who had gathered there. Brusque orders were barked constantly. The people were made to line up. The *Aktion* (round-up) had begun.

Everything was happening very fast. There was a selection and Ludek's grandparents were separated from the family and pushed to one side, while Fredziu was shoved to the other. Ludek was standing beside his parents. The people were segregated in rapid succession. Ludek's father realized that there were now two groups: the young who were sent to the right; the old, the children and the infirm were sent to the left. He sensed that the group in which he and his family found themselves was doomed. He whispered to Ludek, 'I want you to run over to the side where your brother is. You are young. You have a chance. You must live. I know that you will manage.' Ludek was horrified to leave his parents and refused but his father said, 'Go quickly. Now!' and pushed him out of the

line. Ludek had no choice but to do his father's bidding. He ran across without being detected. All this happened in the blink of an eye. In this heroic way Ludek's father saved his life. There was no time to say goodbye. That was the last time he saw his parents and grandparents, his aunt and his uncle. All the people in that group were taken away and sent to their death in the death camp of Bełżec.

The group in which Ludek and Fredek found themselves was transported to Wieliczka, a small town known for its salt mines about five kilometres from Niepołomice and some three kilometres from Kraków. There they joined the multitudes of Jewish people who had also been through the same process of selection in all the surrounding townships and villages. In Wieliczka they were made to stay until all the others were rounded up and joined them. The people were heartbroken, disorientated, hungry, thirsty and exhausted to the point of numbness. They lost track of time.



*Ludek's brother
Fredek aged 15,
1937*

The two brothers thankfully managed to stay together, after having gone through yet another selection. They were sent with many others to Stalowa Wola, an infamous camp situated in a forest, three kilometres from the town of the same name, which was known for its steel foundry. Here the people were tattooed with a KL in ink on their hand, herded into a barracks and assigned a wooden bunk. Ludek defiantly and successfully sucked the ink from his hand, not yet understanding the implications and

consequences that such an act of defiance meant. Luckily, it went unnoticed.

They lived in appalling conditions with hardly any food to sustain them, working from before dawn till dusk. The camp was fenced with barbed wire and guarded by vicious dogs, Ukrainians and German SS. It was back-breaking work. Some of the people worked in the foundry and had to walk to and from work for three kilometres daily. There were no roads and when it rained, they walked in mud. Ludek and his brother were assigned to building roads. They were given a spade each and ordered to dig the ground. It was hard labour twelve hours a day and they were starved of food. They felt their strength ebbing. After being in that camp for two months Fredziu whispered to Ludek one day: ‘We will not survive here for much longer. We must escape. I’ll find a way.’ A few days later Fredziu whispered to his brother again: ‘Tomorrow, before dawn, as soon as I say “run” you run. Don’t waste a second. Don’t think, just run.’

It was still dark when they went out to work in the muddy tracks with their spades. It was autumn already and very cold. They worked standing next to each other and when Fredziu whispered ‘Now,’ Ludek dropped his spade where he stood and ran. He saw his brother do the same. The boys sprinted towards a gap in the barbed wire, slid out and ran through the woods, their hearts pounding.

When they reached the town they stopped, caught their breath and got their bearings. Trying to appear calm, they walked to the railway station, where they bought two train tickets to the town in the opposite direction from Kraków. They expected that as soon as it was light, their flight would be discovered and the guards would

concentrate their search on the trains travelling to Kraków. They travelled a long way and it was already mid-morning when they got off the train at the last station. Cautiously, they made their way yet again to the ticket window at the station in Rozwadów and bought two train tickets back to Kraków, hoping that by now the hunt for them had been abandoned. Outwardly calm, they joined the other passengers and mixed with the crowd, but inwardly they were on edge and anxious.

The train was crowded. Not wanting to speak to anyone in case they betrayed their anxiety, they tried to lose themselves in the crowd hoping that there would be safety in numbers.

Obviously, the journey back to Kraków lasted twice as long but their strategy had been sound. The boys were exhausted and had not slept, eaten or drunk anything since they ingested a bowl of the watery camp soup the previous evening.

The train stopped at one of the stations and there seemed to be a commotion. The platform was swarming with German SS. Some people in the compartment asked what was happening? 'Oh nothing,' came the reply. 'They are just looking for Jews.' It took the two boys all their strength to keep calm and not betray what they felt. They were in danger of their lives and they had to listen to their compatriots speak with such indifference to the plight of their fellow citizens. The indifference of the Poles added to their misery and they knew that they could not trust them. This hurt and rankled.

Many hours and more than 200 kilometres later, this most traumatic, nerve-wracking journey finally came to an end. Exhausted, hungry and frightened, they managed to reach Kraków

just before curfew. Where to now? They had no home or family anymore. The curfew was fast approaching. To be in the street after curfew and to be Jewish in a city that was *judenrein*, was doubly dangerous. They had to be vigilant and keep their wits about them. There was also the danger of being recognized by people who might know them and who could choose to denounce them. They thought of Anda Telega, their former maid, and decided to walk to her house in the hope that she would put them up for the night at least. She lived in an apartment a short distance from the station. Luckily, they found her at home. She gasped when she saw them and although she was glad, she was also apprehensive. Anda was kind. She fed them, made a bed for them and let them stay the night. They discussed their plight with her trying to find some way out of their hopeless situation. Anda explained that because she lived in an apartment house, she would be unable to hide them in her flat for fear that they might be seen by some of her neighbours whom she could not trust. Besides, there was a matter of food rationing and three people would not be able to manage on one food ration. She was very apologetic and very sorry. There were tears. She wished them well. It was a sad parting. They left in the morning, the hopelessness of their situation unresolved.

There was one last chance of some help and they made their way to a shop at No. 6 Ulica Długa in the centre of the city practically around the corner from their former home. The sign over the shop read *Władysława-Galanterja Męska* (Władysława's Men's Accessories). The shop belonged to Władzia, the non-Jewish fiancée of Ludwik Lamensdorf, Regina Goldstein's cousin. Lukek and Fredziu knew her well. She was a good and trustworthy

person. When Władzia saw them she quickly hurried them off to the back room of the store, making sure that no one saw them. The boys told her of their predicament. The three of them discussed the options. What could be their best plan of action? There was no solution. They came to the sad conclusion that there was no place for these two boys anywhere in the city of their birth.

Unfortunately, the only course of action left to them was the ghetto. The ghetto was in Podgórze, a fair walk from Kraków. It was decided that they would stay in the back room of the shop and wait till just before curfew, then make their way towards the ghetto gates and try joining a returning work detachment of Jewish slave labourers and sneak into the ghetto. This plan was not without danger, but it was their only option after such a valiant effort to escape.

Władzia was very concerned but regrettfully all that she could do was to keep them out of sight as long as possible. They spent the day in the back room behind the shop, speaking in whispers and waiting. They were grateful for the respite. She was good to them and she fed them. When the time came to leave, Władzia provided them with some food. She wished them good luck and they left. After the long walk to Podgórze, which in itself was fraught with great danger, they reached the ghetto gates in time to attach themselves to one of the returning *Arbeit komando* (work detachment). Ludek was just sixteen years old and Fredek was twenty.

In the ghetto they met people they knew, friends and some distant relatives. They stayed with some friends who shared their room. They also found their first cousin Zyguś, the son of their uncle Edek and aunt Sabina. Uncle Edek had died before the war

and Aunt Sabina had been deported, so Zyguś lived in the ghetto with relatives of his mother. Zyguś was one year younger than Ludek. Ludek was fond of this cousin and admired his ability to play the mouthorgan.

Life in the ghetto was bleak. There were constant deportations. No family was left intact. One day during a raid, Zyguś was taken away and deported, never to be seen again. The people suffered terribly with perpetual hunger and deprivation. After work in the evenings they read and played cards. To keep sane, Fredziu taught Ludek the game of Bridge.

Whenever she had the opportunity to find a Polish person who had a permit to enter the ghetto, Władzia would send some food to the boys but it was becoming more and more difficult to do so.

Fredek was put to work with a *kommando* that worked outside the ghetto and although it was hard work, it afforded him the opportunity to encounter some Poles who might give them or sell them some food. Sometimes when they were lucky to work in the fields they found a carrot or a cabbage leaf or even a potato.

In Kraków before the war, there had been a factory that produced enamel-coated kitchen utensils, pots, pans, bowls and even chamber pots. This factory belonged to a Jewish man by the name of Abraham Bankier. The Germans requisitioned that factory to produce grenade fuses for the German war effort, as well as continuing the production of pots and pans using Jewish slave labour. They relocated the factory into the ghetto in Podgórze in the district of Zabłocie.

A German *Kommissar* by the name of Oscar Schindler was appointed to represent the German government of occupation. He

nller's List		http://data.jewishgen.org/w/connect/wc.dll?jg-jsearch-model2-[schindler]schindler			
Searching for Surname Goldstein (D-M code 584360) Number of hits: 11 Run on Monday 9 January 2012 at 04:03:50					
Name	List	Gender		Camp	Disposition
	Source	Born	Occupation		
	Section				
	Davar	1918			
	A				
GOLDSTEIN, Bernard	A	Male			
	Yad Vashem	1903		Shindler	Survived
			Metalworker		
GOLDSTEIN, Cyrena	A	Female			
	Yad Vashem	1899		Shindler	Survived
			Metalworker		
GOLDSTEIN, Idele	A	Male			
	Yad Vashem	1906		Shindler	Survived
			Instalator		
GOLDSTEIN, Ludwig	B	Male			
	Davar	1926			DURKEVICH
	A				
GOLDSTEIN, Maurice	B	Male			
	Davar	1902			

*Copy of Schindler's registration list.
Ludek's name is the one before last*

in turn appointed the previous owner to manage the factory. Ludek was one of the first twenty people who was put to work there. He was the youngest in that group and was well liked. Among those twenty people was the Presser family, a mother, a daughter and a married son with his wife. The older Mrs Presser was very fond of Ludek and mothered him a little. Later many more people were added to the workforce of this factory.

In this factory huge kilns where the enamel products were baked were fired at very high temperatures. Those kilns emitted extreme heat. The products were first dipped in the enamel and then put

into the kilns to be fired. Ludek's job was to put the utensils, or the fuses, into the kiln and take them out red hot when they were ready. He also had to clean the kiln when the ash was still hot and the embers still glowing. It was dangerous work. When Ludek got hold of a raw potato or two, which happened rarely, he would cook them in the kiln in one of the utensils that were in production at a given time. Sometimes it happened to be a chamber pot and Ludek, with his mischievous sense of humour once told me, "I used to eat potatoes out of a chamber pot," but later adding that it was a brand new one, just off the production line. The main production at the factory however was grenade fuses.

In the beginning the workers had to walk a very long way to get to work. In March 1943, the ghetto in Podgórze was liquidated and a working camp was established in Plaszów. Oscar Schindler got permission to build barracks on the premises so that the people would live where they worked though they were not allowed out. The enamel factory became a work camp known in the ghetto as Emalia.

Although Fredek had the option of joining Ludek at the enamel factory, he chose to stay where he was because of the opportunity of going outside the ghetto and occasionally finding a little extra food. On an infamous day in November of 1943, Fredek and his work detail were returning to the ghetto cold, exhausted and hungry but pleased because on that day they were lucky and had obtained a few potatoes and smuggled them inside their trouser legs, which they wore tied up with string in case of just such an opportunity. When they arrived at the ghetto gate, there was an inspection. The inspector on that day was the commandant of

the ghetto, Amon Getz, a trigger-happy murderer. The boys were searched; the potatoes were found and confiscated. All the young men of this work detail, in the prime of their life, were lined up and shot, Ludek's brother Fredziu among them. Fredek was just twenty-one years old, murdered for the crime of having a few potatoes in his possession. Ewa Jacobson-Landsberger, a friend of Fredek's who survived the war, was amongst the ghetto inhabitants who were forced to watch this slaughter.

Locked up inside the enamel factory, Ludek did not hear about the death of his only beloved brother till the next day. He was seventeen years old and all alone in that hell. He was devastated, but even grieving was a luxury. He buried his pain deep inside. He was the only one left of his entire family.

Sometime in the year 1944 rumour had it that there would be more deportations, the only exception being the workers in Oskar Schindler's enamel factory who were registered and lived there. This factory would remain operational and would be evacuated to Brinitz in Czechoslovakia, together with the people who worked there who were on the registration list. Suddenly, everyone wanted to be included on Schindler's list, but there were only so many workers that he was permitted to take with him. To save their lives, many people were willing to pay anything to be included on that list.

A certain Mr Goldberg, who had access to the worker's list, began taking bribes in exchange for making alterations. By crossing out the names of some of the original workers, he substituted others who offered him exorbitant sums. The stakes were high. People were buying their lives at the expense of others. There were no scruples. Unbeknown to Ludek, his name had been crossed off the list. He

was a young boy, alone with no one to look after his interests and he was unaware of the life and death bargaining that had been going on in the office. Oskar Schindler was away on some business when, on a hot summer's day in August 1944, a large-scale deportation began. All the people of Plaszów were made to assemble at the *Appel Platz*, including all those who had been crossed off Schindler's list, Ludek amongst them. It was an unusually hot day. They were made to sit on the hot asphalt and were kept there without food or drink for a whole day and a whole night.

The next day all the people were deported. Ludek was sent with a transport to Mauthausen, an infamous concentration camp in Austria where there was yet another selection. Here they were again

KL. MAUTHAUSEN		T/ID Nr.	552440		
		Verso			
GOLDSTEIN, Ludwik		84 838			
M.A.I.A		Geb.-Ort	Herr-Nr.		
3.6.7. 1926	Krakau				
Ges.-Duc					
Haft. Pers. Karte	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Korrespondenz	<input type="checkbox"/>	Dokumente	<input type="checkbox"/>
Hf. Bl. Post. Bogen	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>	Inf. Karten	<input type="checkbox"/>
Erlaute-Karte	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Schreib-Karte	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Nr.-min.-Karte	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Blattkarte	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Reviertkarte	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Krankenblätter	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Todesfalleinnahme	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Todesmeldung	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Starbeurkunde	<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>
Bemerkungen:					
Umschlag-Nr.:					

Ludek's Mauthausen Konzentration Camp registration card, 1944

segregated into groups. While on the cattle train to Mauthausen, Ludek befriended Oscar Hanner, a boy a little older than he. Together with others, they were sent to Melk in the Austrian Alps about 100 kilometres east of the city of Linz. Their clothes were taken from them, including his treasured gift from his grandfather, and they were given coarse blue-and-grey-striped prison garb. Their hair was shaven and they were given a number by which they would be identified. Ludek's was number 84838. They had to memorize their five-digit personal identification number quoting it very fast in German: *Vierundachtzigtausendachthunderedundachtunddreissig*. A further step in the dehumanization process. Failing to comply with this edict would lead to severe punishment. It could even cost them their life. Until the end of his life, Ludek never forgot that number.

In Melk they were put to backbreaking forced labour, digging underground tunnels inside the mountains from before sun up till after sun down. They were marched to work passing the houses of the local population, who crossed themselves when they saw these living skeletons. Their meager food consisted of one small slice of dark, clay-like bread and a cup of black unsweetened liquid that passed for coffee in the morning, and a watery soup with some potato peels floating in it in the evening.

Oskar Hanner was a most decent human being, kind, wise and loyal, and the two boys looked after each other. Their bunks were next to each other and they shared the little food they were sometimes able to scrounge. Every inmate received a ration of two cigarettes a day. Luckily Ludek and Oscar did not smoke and bartered their cigarette rations for a slice of bread. They encouraged one another, trying to keep their hope alive. Hope and friendship

were a lifeline to survival, the only vestige of humanity in the most inhumane of places. The inmates were constantly under guard and were not allowed to speak to each other when at work, but they managed to defy their jailers by a barely audible whisper of the catch phrase of encouragement: '*Trzymaj się*' (Hold On! Don't give up), which was of such vital importance to each of them when hope was in such short supply. Death was everywhere. People were dying of starvation and exhaustion and of the severe beatings that were administered.

Ludek developed an abscess on his leg. He was in excruciating pain and he had a fever, but he was forced to go on working. He could not afford to admit that he was not well, so he trudged to work each day suffering terribly, enduring the pain in silence. The abscess burst after an unbearable week, which he miraculously survived.

Autumn gave way to winter and so there was the bitter, freezing cold of the Austrian Alps to contend with. They marched to work in deep snow, in temperatures below zero in pre-dawn darkness and wearing only the threadbare prison garb they had received in the summer when they arrived. The conditions in the tunnels where they worked ankle deep in freezing water were unimaginably appalling.

In January of 1945, as the Soviet army was nearing Austria, when the hope of liberation became more plausible, the inmates of Melk were marched out of the camp. Loaded onto small boats without food or water and with no room to move, they were cast onto the Danube River. This long nightmarish voyage that lasted many days eventually came to an end in the city of Linz, near the Czech border in central-north Austria.

When this sorry human cargo was unloaded, there were many,

many dead and those who survived were barely alive. Tragically, there was no respite for them. As soon as they disembarked, they were ordered to march at gun point, in ankle deep snow, wearing wooden clogs without socks, attired in light-weight, striped pajamas. Exhausted, frozen and deprived of food and sleep, they trudged for days without respite on this death march. From before day break till dark. Behind them were a trail of blood-soaked snow and a multitude of corpses. After walking for 80 kilometres and for many days, they arrived, barely alive, in Ebensee, another branch camp of Mauthausen, where the nightmare continued unabated.

Ebensee was a small, picturesque village on the Traumsee in the Austrian Alps. The camp was situated below the village in a forest at the foot of snow-covered mountains. There they slept in unheated wooden barracks on hard bunks stacked three tiers high. To add to their suffering, Ludek and Oscar had the top bunks. They were mostly so exhausted that the effort to climb up was torture. It was cold and bleak both inside and out.

Again, they were made to work from before daybreak till dark inside the bowels of the mountains, building tunnels for storing the German V8 rockets. Many of the boys were working with pneumatic drills that were much heavier than their body weight. Ludek was shoveling and lifting heavy rocks onto wagons. Others had to push those heavy wagons along to another part of the tunnel.

The camp held many thousands of prisoners of many nationalities and types: there were political prisoners, Jews, Gypsies and homosexuals, as well as criminals. They were all treated abominably but the Jews were subjected to the worst treatment – what the Germans termed ‘special treatment.’ They

were also supervised by guards of various other nationalities who could be very cruel and were eager to use force, especially those who were ill-disposed towards Jews.

Long, hopeless winter days dragged on. Each day seemed longer than a year and to add to their troubles, a wet spring followed that cruel winter. The snow was melting into slush. There was now water in the tunnels and their feet in the worn-out clogs were submerged in freezing cold water as they worked. It was so hard to get warm. The lice infestation was an added torture. The wind blew through the broken windowpanes of the camp washroom. By now they were living skeletons, the walking dead. Ever more people were dying daily. There were corpses everywhere.

One morning in May when they were all assembled on the *Appel Platz*, the camp commandant ordered the prisoners to get into the tunnels as usual. However, the Spanish orderlies, who were political prisoners, had warned them to disobey that order. Rumour had it that the tunnels were packed with explosives and that once inside the prisoners would be trapped and the tunnels, together with the people in them, would be blown up. The inmates believed this and did not obey the order. No punishment followed. The next morning the Germans were gone and, thanks to the Spaniards, many lives were saved.

On 5 May 1945, the 80th Tank Division of the United States Army arrived in Ebensee, liberating the camp and the surviving inmates, including Ludek, not quite nineteen years old, and Oscar, his best friend. The soldiers came upon a nightmare. They beheld a scene impossible to describe – Dante's Inferno, Hell on Earth. They beheld dead bodies and walking skeletons. The horror was crippling.

The Americans did not lose any time organizing a kitchen and proceeded to cook a nourishing, rich soup for them. The survivors were beside themselves with anticipation. They lined up holding out their soup bowls. Many people gulped their soup so fast that they managed to return for a second helping. Ludek had no strength to push and waited his turn and when his turn finally came, they had run out of soup! He was devastated. His desperation was too much to bear. He berated himself for not pushing forward like the others. Suddenly, those who had eaten the soup seemed to be doubling over in pain, dying in great numbers. The soup had been too rich for these emaciated people, who had not had a decent meal in years ,and it was too much for their starving bodies to digest. The soldiers had meant well but did not realize the condition of these people, whose stomachs had shrunk and shriveled.

Ludek never forgot the feeling of despair that overtook him when he missed out on that soup, although it turned out to be a blessing in disguise. Later, a lighter, more easily digestible soup was made, more appropriate for these starved, skeletal humans. As they swallowed their meal – homeless, orphaned, with nothing to call their own – they rejoiced in what was most precious: their lives and their liberation! After six years of slavery, deprivation and loss, they were free!

Nearly sixty years later, on the other side of the world in Melbourne, Australia, after Ludek passed away, a friend of his, Isaac Benski, who had survived the camp with him, came to see me to pay his respects. He told us: ‘Do you know that Ludek saved my life in Ebensee, the day that we were liberated?’ Isaac Benski told us that he was one of the lucky ones to have received the

first batch of soup and was dying of a twisted bowel when Ludek and Oscar saw him in agony. Had it not been for these two boys' quick response, Isaac Benski would not be alive today to tell the story of how the boys, barely alive themselves, unable to lift him, dragged Isaac on the ground all the way to the tent of the army headquarters and handed him over to the American medical staff there. That was the first time that I had ever heard this story. Ludek had never mentioned it. This was so characteristic of him, modest and quietly humble.

Three days after the soup incident, the war officially ended. It was 8 May 1945. About 30,000 prisoners were liberated at Ebensee. Most of the non-Jewish prisoners soon left the camp to return home to their respective countries. The Jewish prisoners had no country, nor home, to which to return and so they remained in Ebensee, which became a displaced persons camp temporarily administered by the American army.

At this point Ludek and Oscar befriended boys who were to be their friends for life. There was Yurek Aleksandrowicz, Yurek Wahrhaftig, Natek Kohn, and Samek Goetz. Help came for these orphaned boys some weeks later, when members of the Bricha, Jewish Brigade, arrived. They gathered the Jewish survivors, took them out of the camp and put them on a train, travelling through the Brenner Pass, that was repatriating Italian prisoners of war back to Italy. When they arrived in Rome, they were temporarily placed at the Cinecita Studios complex, the home of Italian film. Here they were registered and asked where they wanted to go. Most people wanted to go to Palestine, others to the United States, Canada or South America if they believed that they had relatives or friends there. Ludek thought that he would have liked to go to

*Front row standing; Samek Getz, Yurek Alexandrowicz, Natan Kohn
and Yurek Wahrhaftig; sitting in the middle is Ludwik Goldstein;
Oskar Hanner is standing at the back. Santa Maria al Bagno, June 1945*



America. At the first opportunity, Ludek dispatched a postcard to Poland informing Władzia of his survival. It read: 'I am alive!' signed, Ludek.

Unbeknown to Ludek and his brother, at the time of their flight from Stalowa Wola camp and their visit to Władzia in her shop, Władzia's Jewish fiancée was hiding in a hole in the ground beneath the back room of the shop. He heard them and was aware of their plight but obviously could not make his presence known. He sat there in the dark every day. Only at night when the shop was closed was he able to come up into the room through the floor of a wardrobe that camouflaged his hiding place. To keep his sanity, Władzia bought paint, paper and brushes so that Ludek Lamensdorf could keep himself busy painting by candlelight while hiding in that hole for the duration of the war. At war's end, he was quite an accomplished miniaturist. What a brave and kind woman Władzia was. It was a nerve-wracking ordeal for them both. Though they both survived, they never got over the trauma of that experience.

After a short stay in Cinecita, the boys were driven in a convoy of military vehicles to the southern part of Italy to the district of Apulia. They were brought to a most picturesque locality by the name of Santa Maria al Bagno on the Ionian coast two kilometres from Nardo in Apuglia, on the heel of the boot of Italy. It was a small village with white villas and some small wooden houses that faced a safire-blue sea. There they were cared for, housed and supplied with food and some clothing by the the Joint, in conjunction with UNRRA. Ludek, Oscar, Yurek Wahrhaftig and Yurek Alexandrowicz shared a room. Natek Kohn shared one with Samek Getz.



Ludek at Santa Maria al Bagno, 1945

Santa Maria al Bagno was paradise to those survivors from Hell. The clear blue skies and the deep blue sea of the calm waters of the bay provided a salve for their souls. To this day, everyone who was there recalls this place and the time that they spent there as the best part of their lives. It was a carefree time for them, a time to recuperate and reclaim a little of their youth, which had so cruelly been cut short by their persecution. They were eager to regain their lost years and reclaim the joy of living, inspite of the uncertainty of the future. They lived one day at a time, knowing how precious each hour was, and they cherished every minute of the life that Santa Maria al Bagno had to offer. Soon they met and befriended others who arrived from other camps. Ludek's circle

of friends increased when he met Janek and Dudek Schnall, who he knew from Kraków, Lusia Kałowska, her older sister, Eda, and Morrie Sheppett.

When Ludek had to spend some time in hospital with pleurisy, a result of his camp experiences, his friends came to visit him daily and kept him company.

Since none of them had family they became a close-knit group of friends who helped each other in every way and created a close bond with one another that truly lasted a lifetime. Their main concern, however, was the matter of emigration, their future and permanence. Everyone was desperate to emigrate. It was very difficult. Palestine was blockaded by the British; America had a quota and a long waiting list. A return to Poland after the reception that survivors had received there was out of the question. They were stateless. There was no one and nothing left to return to.

In the meantime, they enjoyed life as much as they could. They organized sports clubs, they formed a soccer team, which Ludek joined; they swam daily and frolicked in the Ionic Sea. Ludek attended classes and became a sports instructor. They played pranks on one

UNITED NATIONS RELIEF AND REHABILITATION ADMINISTRATION ITALIAN MISSION - BUREAU OF RELIEF SERVICES - CAMPS DIVISION CAMP'S OWN LIBRARY REF. NR. V/160/0	
THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT <i>Goldstein Leopold</i>	
has completed a course of training in PHYSICAL CULTURE	
under the auspices of UNRRA Italian Mission, Bureau of Relief Services, Camps Operations Division and now is qualified to act as Instructor in this subject.	
Lecce, 1946	
<i>P. P. [Signature]</i> Physical Training Consultant.	<i>M. M. [Signature]</i> A. M. [Signature] Physical Welfare Officer Lecce.

*Ludek's physical instructor
certificate, 1946*



another and slept on the beach on those warm summer nights savouring their freedom.

On Saturday nights, a crowd of friends would walk two kilometres to a dance hall in Nardo, where they danced the evening away to the live music of an epileptic pianist. They enjoyed music and his playing, but he would often fall into an epileptic fit. The music would stop, and so would the dancing. Then after a while, the pianist would recover, sit back down on the piano stool and continue playing where he had left off as if nothing untoward had happened; people resumed their dancing. Nobody minded once they understood what was happening and they returned every week to enjoy themselves, then would happily walk the two kilometres back. Ludek and his five friends would hitch train rides to Naples to go sightseeing. Time passed. Many people married in Santa Maria al Bagno and some even bore children.

Eda and Morrie were childhood sweethearts who were miraculously reunited in Santa Maria al Bagno. The story of Eda and Morrie Sheppett's wedding is of note. They decided to get married and walked to the municipal offices in Nardo two kilometres away. They asked some friends of theirs who were dating at the time to accompany them and act as their witnesses. After Eda and Morrie were married, the other couple were so inspired that they decided then and there to get married themselves. The newly-weds, Eda and Morrie, returned the favour and served as their witnesses. The two married couples walked all the way back to Santa Maria al Bagno to a lunch of sandwiches prepared for them by their friend Natek.

It was extremely difficult to emigrate anywhere in the world if there was no family who would sponsor an immigrant. A few were fortunate to have relatives overseas who had emigrated before the

war and with time, people who had been sponsored by relatives, were leaving for various destinations around the world.

Yurek Alexandrowicz's father lived in America. He immediately applied for an affidavit to bring his son to him. Yurek immigrated to America in 1946. His father, at the behest of his son, also applied for an affidavit for his son's friend Ludek. As Ludek was not their relative, his application was denied. There was a quota for Polish immigrants to the United States. Ludek's registration number was 5096. He would have had a very long wait. On arrival Yurek resumed his interrupted schooling. He studied at university and became a neuroscientist. When he was eighty years old, he researched, wrote and published his family history going back to fifteenth century Poland, a book titled, *Generations*.

Oscar Hanner went to Cremona, where he found his cousin Oscar Baum, who had survived in Russia. They had an aunt living in Melbourne, and she sponsored them both. They were known as big Oscar and little Oscar.

Morrie Sheppett had a brother in Melbourne, who sent him a landing permit, which enabled him, his pregnant wife, Eda, and her sister Lusia, to emigrate to Australia. Other friends of Ludek who had emigrated and settled in Australia found jobs and accommodation and they found it a very welcoming country. Some of them kindly helped other friends to join them by sponsoring them who in turn helped others when they settled.

Samek Goetz met and fell in love with Gertie in Santa Maria al Bagno. They immigrated to the United States in 1949, where he had an uncle and she an aunt who sponsored them. Later in life he was instrumental in creating a small museum in Santa Maria

al Bagno in remembrance of the happy times that these Holocaust survivors enjoyed there.

Yurek Wahrhaftig, who was an avid Zionist, was determined to make his life in Palestine and managed to get there despite the blockade. He learned to fly planes, became an expert pilot, joined the Israeli Air Force, and eventually became Deputy Chief of the Israeli Air Force. He was instrumental in the rescue of the Entebbe Hostages in 1976. The book *90 Minutes Over Entebbe* is dedicated to Yerucham Amitai, the Hebrew name that he assumed on arrival in Israel.

Meantime, the people who were still in Santa Maria al Bagno in 1947 had been relocated to displaced persons camps situated in Palese and later that year to Barletta. Both towns were situated near Bari on the southeastern coast. They were housed in army barracks where living conditions were inadequate. Each barrack was partitioned with plywood or blankets and was shared by more than 50 people. Hygiene was poor; there was no privacy and the food much below standard. So Ludek, Oscar and their friend Eddie Blatt decided to take their food rations and live in Naples for a while. They became acquainted with some Polish officers who served in the British Army stationed in Naples. Through them they were able to frequent the Neafi Effi British Army club, which enabled them to purchase cigarettes and alcohol at much cheaper prices. American and English cigarettes were the currency of the time. They then sold them at a profit. Thus, they were able to earn a little money to pay for their food and lodgings in Naples for a few days. The boys returned to camp and waited. It took another two-and-a-half years of enduring life in the DP camps before Ludek's odyssey came to an end.

C9600 V48/3/4415
COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA.

Form No. 41.

Permit -C- 9600

DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION,
Melbourne, Victoria.
24th August, 1948.

This Permit is valid
until 24th August, 1950

LANDING PERMIT.

THIS IS TO CERTIFY that authority has been granted for the admission into Australia of Ludwig GOLDSZTEIN residing in Italy ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~
~~xxxxxxxxxxxxxx~~, whose particulars and photographs appear hereon.

This authority has been granted subject to the following conditions :-

- (a) the bearer is in possession of a valid Polish Passport or Certificate of Identity duly issued (if not issued) by an Australian or other British Consular or Passport Officer and bearing copy of his/her photograph;
- (b) the person or persons included in this Permit are of good character, in sound health and shall produce to the Consular or Passport Officer to whom application is made for a visa, a satisfactory medical certificate on the attached Form No. 47A and evidence of good character;

NOTE: The bearer will be admitted to Australia under exemption from the provisions of the Immigration Act, 1901-1940 for a period of two years.

This permit is issued subject to the condition also that the grantee produces to the Australian or other British Consular or Passport Officer to whom application is made for a visa for Australia a certificate of negative x-ray chest examination from a qualified medical practitioner. The film/s on which such certificate is based must be produced to the Immigration Authorities on arrival in Australia.

Transmitted per: Mr. Felix K. Sheppet,
29 Dickens Street,
Elwood,
VICTORIA.



PARTICULARS AND PHOTOGRAPHS OF PERSONS WHOSE ADMISSION HAS BEEN AUTHORIZED.

BY AUTHORITY : L. V. JONES, COMMONWEALTH IMMIGRATION OFFICER.

Grantee : Full Name Ludwig GOLDSZTEIN

Age 20 years

Nationality Polish

Height 5 feet 7 inches

Colour of eyes Brown

Colour of hair Dark

Special peculiarities Nil.



Wife : Full Name ---

Age ---

Children : Names. --- Sex Age

Landing permit to Australia, 1948

Morry and Eda Sheppett settled happily in Melbourne and eventually sponsored their friends Ludek and Natek. In December 1948 the boys sailed from Genoa aboard the SS *Napoli*, an Italian ship belonging to the Flotta Lauro Company. When the ship berthed in Adelaide they were unable to proceed on the voyage to Melbourne due to a three-day strike. The Adelaide Jewish Community became aware that there were Jewish Holocaust survivors on board and honoured them with a welcoming reception. There the two boys met the Kindler family. Later when the family relocated to Melbourne, that initial encounter blossomed into a firm friendship.

The *Napoli* arrived in Melbourne on New Year's Day, January 1949. Ludek's friend Jack Newker, who had arrived earlier from Santa Maria al Bagno, met them on arrival. While they waited for the luggage to be unloaded, Ludek and a priest whom he had befriended on board ship decided to disembark. Jack invited them to a pub for a celebratory cold beer but on arrival at the pub, they were denied entry because Ludek had not complied with the dress code of the establishment. He wore an open-neck shirt and no tie. Instead Jack bought their beer and they toasted their arrival in Australia outside of the pub.

Eda and Morry were kind and hospitable. They invited their newly arrived friends to stay with them in their small flat in Elwood until they could find suitable accommodation and employment. Natek soon moved out to live with his brother, whom he had miraculously found alive and well in Melbourne. Ludek got a job with General Motors Holden. He rented a room over a shop in Brunswick from a Jewish family. The landlady kindly prepared sandwiches for him to take to work for lunch.

The people he met were generous with advice. One of his friends suggested that he try for a job as a machinist in a clothing factory, sewing men's trousers. The faster he could work, the more trousers he could produce, the more he could earn. He tried that, but Ludek was no tailor. He could not produce enough trousers to earn a decent wage. Tailoring was not his calling.

What Ludek really wanted was to become electrician but after making enquiries, he was told that he must become an apprentice first, which he was quite happy to do but, unfortunately, the wages for an apprentice were £1 per week. For a single, young man with no family to support him, it would have been impossible for him to support himself with accommodation and the evening meal in a restaurant to pay for.

There were several continental restaurants that catered for the newly arrived young men who had no families. Some of these eateries were in private homes where the lady of the house was the cook and catered for many of the young men who arrived after work for dinner. Ludek used to frequent Mrs Wachtel's house in Elwood. It was a homely place. Mrs Wachtel, who was Viennese, was a good cook and a friendly, motherly lady. Dinner was served in her dining room on a large round table, in the centre of which Mr Wachtel placed a very large soup tureen with steaming soup and a ladle. The guests then served themselves.

Ludek's friend Max Kestin was working at a knitting factory. He offered to teach Ludek to operate a knitting machine. Ludek learnt fast, so when Max left his job to work for his father, who had just started his own knitting factory, he introduced Ludek to his boss, Mr Grodzki, the owner of Artknit Creations Knitting Mills. Mr Grodzki employed him at once. Ludek liked the job. It was

piecework, alternating between day and night shifts.

Ludek soon moved to St. Kilda above a chemist shop in Carlisle Street and shared a room with his friend David Lipszyc. David owned a motorcycle and often gave Ludek a lift to work. They had some wild rides when they were running late. Ludek learned to play tennis and played soccer with the Maccabi Soccer Club.

Very soon he had a large circle of friends in Melbourne in addition to the ones he already knew from Santa Maria al Bagno. He was a popular boy, well liked and respected by young and old.

By the time Ludek and I met, he was quite at home in his adopted country.



Ludek's Friends in Australia, 1950

Standing L-R: Nadek, Benek, Oskar, Oskar Baum

Seated L-R: Chaim, Max, Ludek, Stanley

THE TWO OF US
PART FIVE

5

Ludek and I dancing at Bebka and Benek's wedding 1951



I had recently met Ludek when he and Eva invited me to a New Year's Eve party that a group of their friends was organising. David Lipszyc's sister Mercia very kindly offered her house in Glen Eira Road, Caulfield, for the occasion. Friends were asked to bring their friends along. Most of the guests and organisers were single young men and women. They were newly arrived refugees, most of them Holocaust survivors. The house was filled with many guests.

We danced to prewar records provided by the hostess: Polish polkas, tangos, waltzes and a few up-to-date sambas and rumbas. We danced; we sang; we talked. There was food but there was no alcohol. There was no need for any. Just being alive was fantastic! We were all high on freedom and youth. We greeted the New Year of 1950 in our new country with great optimism and wished each other a very Happy New Year.

The party continued in full swing till dawn. It was the first such party that I had ever attended. It was fun, enjoyable, lively and memorable. A few of us caught the 6 am tram, the first tram of the day and we had it all to ourselves. We laughed a lot and spoke loudly in Polish. At some point a passenger ascended the tram, a young woman impeccably attired in riding gear, her blonde hair severely pulled back from her face and a disapproving look. She took a seat in the compartment next to ours. Somehow, she made her presence felt. An atmosphere of indignation emanated from her, which we tried to ignore when suddenly she stood up tall and straight and with a look of utter displeasure deliberately strode over to the empty compartment at the other end of the tram and very loudly slammed the door shut.

Later in the day Ludek, Oskar, Natek, Eva and I met near the

river in Kew where we hired some boats and went boating on the Yarra and then enjoyed a picnic on its banks. It was a beautiful, sunny summer's day, a nice way to begin the new year of 1950.



There was an acute housing shortage in Melbourne. It was very difficult to find somewhere to live, be it a house, a flat or even a dwelling over a shop. Finding living quarters for a family with young children was particularly difficult. A 'no children' or 'Christian family only' rider at the end of to let advertisements was common. The next day's edition of *The Age* newspaper was released at midnight. It was customary to queue up in the evening at the offices of *The Age* in the city in order to be one of the first to scan the to let advertisements, then rush to the given address and hope to arrive there before anyone else and, with luck, be able to secure the dwelling. There was no question of choice about where one wanted to live, but rather one lived where a dwelling was available. The payment of key money, a non-refundable, one-time payment asked from a prospective tenant for the provision of the key to the premises, although illegal, was paid out of desperation.

We eventually found a pleasant, white, weatherboard house at the end of the tramline in East Preston. The house was roomy, comprising two bedrooms, a lounge and dining room and a spacious kitchen. I had a room all to myself and bought my own bed and a nice rug for the floor on hire purchase. The laundry with a copper for boiling clothes, and the toilet were in an outhouse in the backyard. The lovely peach trees and the large yard more

than compensated for that. We paid the key money of £100, which Hansi and Inka had to borrow. The rent that we paid was 32s 6d per week, which was affordable. Hansi and I were both working. I contributed £2 a week for my board.

I went to work by tram. The fare from East Preston to the city was 6d.

Later, when Giselle started school, I took her with me on my way to work and we travelled on the double-decker bus. I dropped her off at school in High Street, Northcote, then took the next bus to work in the city.

Every Friday evening after work, Irma travelled by train to visit me in Shower Street. Irma and I had become good friends. We were introduced by her Aunt Lottie, whom I had befriended on the *Cyrenia*. We all had dinner together and then the four of us played the card game we knew as the Red King. Those Fridays were lots of fun. We spent many enjoyable evenings together that are still fondly remembered by all of us.

Irma lived with her auntie Lottie and uncle Walter. They had found a flat in Richmond. Every Sunday afternoon, Eva and I visited them. Auntie Lottie (that is what we all called her) served us afternoon tea of freshly brewed coffee and cake topped with whipped cream. We had interesting conversations about the past, the future and life in general. They were a nice couple. Uncle Walter was a musician and loved to play his trombone. He applied to play with the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra but unfortunately could not get employment with them because he was not a citizen. To obtain Australian citizenship one had to wait five years. In the meantime, he worked at General Motors Holden and was most unhappy.



Oscar had a utility van that he needed for work. Sometimes on Sunday mornings in the summer we piled into his utility and headed for the Dandenong Ranges and spent the day there. In those days in Melbourne, with everything was closed on Sundays, petrol and alcohol were only available ten miles out of the metropolitan area.

Many young migrants discovered the Maroondah Lake Hotel and restauraunt with its expansive grounds. On summer Sundays, it became a meeting place for friends and acquaintances and we spent many enjoyable Sundays there. Some years later that hotel burned down and was never rebuilt.

Most Sunday afternoons we visited my friend Bebka, who lived with her mother, Mrs Mandel, opposite the beach in a flat in Beaconsfield Parade. It was always open house at Bebka's place on Sunday afternoons. Every one of her friends and acquaintances would drop in, and sometimes people brought their friends or a new arrival, so there were always new people to meet and new friends to make. The atmosphere was always friendly and the conversation interesting. We caught up on news as well as who was going out with whom, who became engaged or married. And it goes without saying that there would be cake and cups of tea served constantly. As theatres and cinemas were closed on Sundays, people used to entertain at home. In the evenings we would sometimes drop in on Ludek's married friends Eda and Morry Sheppett, where the men would play cards and the women would chat. Afterwards the obligatory supper was served.

Our friends often spent Sunday evenings at Eva's in Brunswick where she lived with her sister Inia and brother-in-law Oswald, an interesting character who fought in the Spanish Civil war. His husky voice was the result of a bullet through his throat, but his beautiful rendition of 'Granada' was a treat to listen to. His work colleagues in Melbourne nicknamed him the Whispering Baritone. He was a knowledgeable man whose tales about his experiences during that time always kept us riveted



*Back; Natek,, Irma, Ludek, Ewa, and Marek
Front; Guta, Oskar, Inia and Oswald*

Sometimes Oswald and some of the boys would play cards. At other times we would amuse one another by telling jokes. Ludek had an unlimited repertoire of jokes on every possible subject and he told them superbly. I remember a Sunday night sitting at their kitchen table, when some of us stayed up till dawn, laughing nonstop while Ludek and some others entertained us with jokes. It was five in the morning when Ludek, Natek and our friend Chaim walked me home from Brunswick to East Preston keeping up the entertainment.

One Sunday night at Eva's, we were glued to the radio listening to the results of the 1951 referendum regarding outlawing the Communist Party of Australia. Although none of us were yet citizens, we were very interested in the process and found it fascinating learning how the Constitution worked in Australia. There was a great deal of tension around the kitchen table because Oswald, Oskar, Chaim, Natek and Ludek were inclined towards socialist politics at the time.



Ludek and I met every Thursday after work in the city. We had dinner at the Topsy restaurant where the food was delicious. The restaurant was situated on the first floor of a building in a lane off Little Collins Street. The owner was Mr Rosza, a charming Hungarian gentleman. After dinner we usually went to the pictures. Ludek lived in St. Kilda and I lived in Preston at the end of the tramline. He always took me home by tram and from there walked me to my front door. He then had to walk back to the tram stop

to take the tram back to the city to catch the last tram to St. Kilda. What chivalry! Those were the days when a boy always escorted a girl back to her front door. Such was the custom and one took it for granted.

One Saturday evening, Ludek arrived to pick me up in a green Vauxhall. His boss had bought a new car and offered to sell his old Vauxhall (registration GAS 156) to Ludek for £100 and to let him pay it off in instalments. Ludek was delighted. From then on I was picked up and taken home in style and he did not need to rush to catch the midnight tram.



Ludek with his green Vauxhall, 1952

On Saturday nights we would go out with friends to one of the cabarets that had sprung up in St. Kilda where beautiful music was played by newly arrived musicians and where alcohol, if desired, was served in coffee cups. There was the Catherina in Acland Street, opposite the Luna Park on the site where McDonalds is now situated. There was the Eden in Barkley Street and the Oran a few doors down on the first floor over a shop and the Balalaika in Hampton. All these places were frequented by newly arrived migrants who were young Holocaust survivors reclaiming their youth and enjoying their life again. The Oran was the most popular of those establishments. We danced to the music of Leo Rosner's piano-accordion and his band playing Latin American sambas, rumbas and tangos, and Hungarian *csárdás*. We waltzed the evening away until closing time at midnight when 'Good Night Sweetheart', the last song, was played. It was the best of times.

At first we would go out in a crowd at the weekends. We really began going out together seriously when Ludek and I were coincidentally invited to the same wedding, he by the groom and I by the bride. The invitations in those days were issued 'with friend'. I decided to decline the invitation to that wedding because I was not brave enough to ask Ludek to accompany me. On one of our Sunday drives to Station Pier in Oskar's utility, we admired the new liners that used to berth there and we talked about how nice it would be to go off to Europe on one of those ships one day. Ludek, in his inimitable way, half-jokingly and half-seriously said, 'When I get rich we'll go together.' That encouraged me to ask him if, in the meantime, he would like to come with me to a wedding. He agreed and asked whose wedding it was and when I mentioned

Shirley and Simon, he told me that he had also been invited to the same wedding.

It was a large, very lavish affair that took place at Ormond Hall, an elegant venue where the décor was all mirrors and chandeliers. It happened to be a double wedding where a brother and sister were married on the same day. This was the first of many weddings that we attended together. Some years later, Ludek was the best man to his friend Oskar, who married my friend Irma. About a year later, I was my friend Eva's matron of honour when she married Marek Winthrope.

On Sunday mornings Ludek would pick me up and we would drive to the St Kilda tennis courts where he would play tennis. We would then go for lunch to the Red Hen in Acland Street, a restaurant where authentic Jewish food was served and where Oscar and Natek usually joined us. This place, where the atmosphere was amiable because mostly everyone knew one another, was always full at lunchtime on Sundays.

My twenty-first birthday fell on a Friday. I invited some friends to my place for afternoon tea on the Saturday. Saba came with her older sister Eda. Lucyna and Max Kestin, Lusia and Janek, Natek, Oskar and, of course, Ludek. They gave me a white rabbit-fur cape that was very much the fashion in evening wear at the time. Saba bought me a record of 'Blue Moon' and 'Smoke Gets in Your Eyes'. That evening Ludek and, I together with Eva, Irma, Oskar and Natek, went out dancing to celebrate my birthday in style at the Catherina Cabaret in St Kilda. Being twenty-one also meant an increase in my pay. I would be getting an adult wage of seven pounds a week.

Ludek and I got engaged on Labour Day weekend of 1953. It also happened to be my birthday. We spent Sunday together as we always did. We visited friends, went for a long drive in the country and in the evening Ludek proposed to me. He presented me with a lovely engagement ring, which fitted me perfectly, and a gift of a beautiful marquisette bracelet. He drove me home but because it was too late to come in, we arranged that he would come at lunchtime to speak to Inka and Hansi. This was just as well because they were in bed already but not asleep. Bursting with happiness and wanting to share it with them, I called out 'I am engaged. I am engaged.' I was met by dead silence in reply. No congratulations were offered. Not even a smile. I was stunned.

When Ludek arrived the next day, the atmosphere was lethal. Inka was sulking. She was an expert spoilsport. She barely managed a curt hello. There was no conversation and the engagement was not mentioned. There was no offer of a *L'chaim*, a toast to celebrate. I felt unbelievably embarrassed and hurt.

Ludek told me that friends of his had invited us for a little celebration in the evening but he thought that my family would like to celebrate with us first. By late afternoon, Ludek, who assessed the situation, said, 'Guta, we have to go; we are invited to Max and Lucyna tonight.' Darling Ludek, always kind, understanding and a true gentleman, told Inka and Hansi that we were invited by his friends to celebrate our engagement and asked if they would like to join us. The answer, true to form, was a curt 'No.'

Ludek had made many good friends in the short time that he had lived in Melbourne. He made friends easily and was well loved by them. He was kind, fun-loving and entertaining, easy-going

and always polite. So that evening, Ludek and I were welcomed at Max and Lucyna's small flat in St Kilda. The furniture from the lounge room had been moved out of the way to make room for the close friends they had invited to celebrate our engagement. There were more than a dozen of us. We sat on the carpeted floor and talked, sang, told jokes, laughed a lot and drank a *L'chaim* to toast the occasion. Eva got a little tipsy and giggled. She was so happy for us. It was a most wonderful, impromptu party, which we enjoyed and shared with warm-hearted friends.

Sadly, the atmosphere at home was icy for at least a week afterwards. Ludek was sweet. 'Don't worry about it,' he said. 'Leave it to me.' The following Sunday afternoon, Ludek and I were invited to Sally and Oskar (Big Oskar) Baum's engagement party at the Catherina. There were many people present and among them many of Ludek's friends. We were warmly congratulated by many people who all wished us well. Mrs Mercia Neuman, the older sister of Ludek's roommate David Lipszyc, was particularly excited by the news of our engagement. She was very fond of Ludek and immediately exclaimed, 'The engagement party will be in my place.'

The following Sunday Ludek's friends Max, David, Chaim, Natek, Oskar, Felek, Janek, Stanley and Benek generously arranged and hosted the most wonderful engagement party for us as their engagement gift to him. Our girlfriends catered and prepared the food and decorated the tables. I particularly recall the beautiful watermelon fruit baskets created by Bebka and Clara. The music was provided by Mrs Neuman's brother-in-law Shmulek Neuman, who was a violinist. It was a large gathering of friends who joined to celebrate with us. There were Ludek's friends from Santa Maria

di Bagni, the people with whom he worked, the people with whom he played tennis, my friends from work, Mr and Mrs Ziffer, Mr and Mrs Fischer, Ludek's cousin Natka with her husband Stefan and Inka with Hansi – all the friends that he and I had made in Melbourne. It was a beautiful evening.

Ludek and I chose to get married in October, six months after our engagement. There was to be just a small reception following the wedding ceremony, so we booked the synagogue and had an interview with the rabbi. The biggest problem we encountered was finding future accommodation but since we had six months, we were optimistic.

Susie Lipszyc recommended a dressmaker in East Malvern who would make my wedding dress. Ludek was having his suit made by a well-known tailor of men's suits, Mr Tatarka from Poland. Mr Ziffer helped with advice regarding the wedding invitations.

I was not going to have any bridesmaids but I very much wanted my little nieces, Giselle and Rosie, to be my flower girls. As their mother complained at the expense of their clothes, I offered to buy them. Inka did not get involved in my wedding preparations at all and was very grumpy most of the time. But when I asked her and Hansi to give me away, they agreed. Ludek's friends Eda and Morry Sheppett, who had sponsored him to Australia, happily agreed to do that for him and his friend Natek was best man.

In the meantime, we were still looking for accommodation. We were in touch with a few estate agents, but the situation did not look promising. About four weeks before the wedding, we found a two-bedroom flat in one of the small streets off Acland Street in St Kilda. We deposited some money with the agent and secure in

the knowledge that we had a place to live, we concentrated on the wedding preparations.

I ordered the flowers at the florist in the Royal Arcade, travelled to the dressmaker by tram for fittings after work, returning home after dark. I bought white shoes and lovely little blue dresses for my flower girls. Two days before the wedding, Ludek received a phone call at work from the real estate agent telling him that the landlord had changed his mind and that the flat was no longer available. We could pick up our money from him whenever it was convenient.

Fortunately, Ludek's cousin Natka came to the rescue. She happened to mention our predicament to the owner of the delicatessen she frequented, who luckily had just heard of someone who wanted to let one room and a kitchenette in her house in Westbury Street, East St. Kilda. The evening before the wedding, Ludek went to see the room, where he left his belongings, got the key and drove all the way to Preston to tell me about it, as we had no telephone.

On the morning of my wedding I went to the hairdresser and on my return, promptly washed my hair again. I did not like it. It did not suit me. I was, however, very happy with my dress. It was made of white broderie anglaise organza. It had a gathered skirt of ballerina length, a fitted bodice, a halter neck, an open back and a long-sleeved bolero over it. I wore a short veil attached to a small hat. My wedding bouquet was of gardenias and stephanotis and it smelled divine.

It was Thursday afternoon on 8 October 1953 when I arrived at the Melbourne Synagogue in Toorak Road with Inka, Hansi and my lovely little flower girls. We were met by the beadle, who told

me that the groom had not arrived yet and led me to a room where I waited for his arrival. I was the rare bride who had arrived before the groom. Poor Ludek was late because Eda was waiting for the delivery of her suit jacket!

Ludek arrived shortly after and waited for me on the *bimah* (podium), as I walked down the aisle preceded by Giselle and Rosie carrying baskets of flowers. Ludek and I smiled at each other. Although we had no relatives, the synagogue was packed with friends, work colleagues and acquaintances. As I walked towards the *chuppa* (wedding canopy), I noticed that it was decorated with beautiful flowers. It seems that there had been a wedding before ours and the decorations had been left on the *chuppa* for us. Rabbi Rappaport officiated at the ceremony. Everything went beautifully and the groom kissed the bride before he was told to do so, much to the amusement of the congregation!

Everyone present was invited to the reception that was held in the upstairs reception room of the synagogue. It was just a *l'chaim*, a small stand-up celebration. I think someone made a speech. Giselle, unnoticed, helped herself to the cherry brandy bottle and was a little tipsy. I threw my wedding bouquet to Eva and she caught it.

It was customary for the bride to change into a going-away outfit. I changed into a two-piece suit, a charcoal grey straight skirt and a charcoal-and-white-striped fitted jacket made for me at Champs Elysee, the factory that belonged to the family of my friend Madelaine. I wore a small white hat, white gloves, black high-heeled shoes and carried a black handbag. In hindsight, I think that it was quite ridiculous to wear such an outfit for a





Guta and Ludek's wedding, 1953

short drive to the country. We said goodbye and Ludek, being the gentleman that he was, told Inka not to worry and that he would take good care of me.

It was evening when we left for our honeymoon to the Maroondah Lake Hotel in Healesville. There was dancing in the ballroom at the hotel when we arrived. The music was enchanting; the dance floor was lit and was changing colours. It was all very romantic. We joined the dancers and managed to dance on our wedding day after all.



With wedding guests Natek, Guta and Ludek, Irma and Oskar



Guta with Hansi, and Inka

Another honeymoon couple from Adelaide were the only other guests in the hotel. It was off-season and renovations were in progress. The Czech waiter asked Ludek if we would like to have breakfast in the room because that would save him setting the table in the dining room, and this suited us.

The weather was lovely, so one day after breakfast we drove over to Warburton, where Lucyna and Max were staying at the Chalet for a few days. We spent the day with them and Ludek managed to play some tennis. On the way back, Ludek decided to take a shortcut over the mountains. It was getting dark and suddenly we drove into a patch of dense fog. Visibility was nil. Every few minutes Ludek stopped the car and got out to see where we were and where the next few feet of the road led. It wasn't funny but we tried to amuse each other with funny comments. It was mysterious, eerie and quite scary. It took us at least one hour to get to Healsville from Warburton but we got there thanks to Ludek's excellent sense of direction.

We arrived back in Melbourne a week later and went straight to our new home. We met the landlords, Mr and Mrs Tillinger, who were originally from Romania. He was a furrier who worked from home. Mrs Tillinger showed me our room, which was very small. The furniture consisted of a wardrobe, a chest of drawers and a single bed with an extension of a narrow plank of wood on two legs between the wall and the bed, which made the bed a little wider. The kitchenette was a small, narrow room that had a stove and a sink, a small table and two chairs. The landlady was very nice and obliging; she kindly offered me the use of one shelf in her fridge.

One night the bed extension suddenly broke a leg and

collapsed. It was hilarious. Mr Tillinger apologized and patched it up somewhat the next day. We had no choice; we had to make do. Meantime we were house hunting, working and going out most evenings.

Shortly before we got married, Ludek started a little knitting factory in partnership with his friend Natek. They only had one knitting machine so they worked in shifts. It was the week that Ludek worked the night shift that I decided to cook our first meal: a simple, home-cooked Polish-style meal of borsht, mashed potatoes and hamburgers. His factory was not far so we arranged that I would ring him when dinner was ready and he would come.

Mrs Tillinger lent me her hand-operated meat mincer. I attached it to the kitchen table, put the cut meat in it and turned the handle. This was not an easy task. It took me the best part of an hour just to mince the meat. I spent a long time preparing and cooking that first meal. Poor Ludek. It was midnight before we ate, but he was very understanding and gracious about it and he praised my cooking saying that it was very tasty.

Once a week after work on a Thursday we took the tram to Preston, where we were invited for dinner to Inka and Hansi. The children and I were always very happy to see one another. I loved those little girls. The atmosphere was much friendlier by that time. Inka, in spite of herself, actually got to like Ludek once she allowed herself to get to know him. We mostly just managed to get the last tram home.

Eventually, seven months later, we found a flat consisting of two rooms, a kitchenette and a bathroom in Barkley Street, St Kilda. It was far from the house of our dreams but we were glad to get it.

The rent was 31s 6d a week and we paid £100 key money, which we had to borrow. Chaim's uncle was kind enough to guarantee a loan for us at the bank, as we had no collateral.

It was a ground-floor flat in a very old building that stood at the back of a much-taller, newer building, which blocked our windows and made our place very dark. A substantial, high-ceilinged bedroom led to a tiny sunroom with a small window. An equally high-ceilinged large living room led to a very small kitchenette, which had a window that was blocked by a wooden stairway that led to the flat above ours.

We chose some nice furniture, a carpet square and, most importantly, a very large, stylish, chrome-trimmed fluorescent light that served as daylight. We bought it all at Myers on hire purchase and took three years to pay it off. A shelf over the fireplace in the lounge room served as my bookshelf. We made the place look very smart and pleasant. We were thrilled with it.

The flat had certain advantages. It was cool in summer because it had very thick walls and it was near the beach. It was centrally situated so friends who were passing dropped in. We also lived near to our good friends Max and Lucyna Kestin. Lucyna was a sociable, naturally friendly girl who had a great sense of fun. She had a talent for making people laugh. We had much in common and enjoyed one another's company.

Importantly, as well, we lived a few doors from the Victory Cinema at the corner of Barkley and Carlisle streets as well as the Palais Cinema on St Kilda Esplanade. Ludek loved the cinema so we would be out almost every night.

Some strange encounters happened during our frequent visits to the cinema. We were at the Victory one night during interval between films chatting with friends when a woman's voice called Ludek's name. We turned around and she called out in disbelief: 'Ludek, is that you? You *are* Alive!' She was Benek Presser's sister who had been with Ludek at Schindler's Emalia before his name had been removed from the list. There were hugs all around right there in the foyer of the Victory. She told Ludek that her mother had also survived and arrangements were immediately made to visit the Pressers at their home. The older Mrs Presser was moved to tears when she saw Ludek, the boy whom she had taken under her wing and lost. Ludek was delighted to see them again.

On another occasion, during the Queen's visit to Melbourne in 1953, Ludek and I left the cinema and walked to the tram stop in Swanston Street. As we were waiting, we saw her black limousine with the royal emblem. It was taking the Queen and Prince Phillip to Government House from a reception at the Exhibition Building. It was nearly midnight; there were very few people about and we managed to catch a glimpse of her through the window of her car. She was very young and petite. She looked very pretty in her lovely sparkling white evening dress and her tiara. We smiled and waved to her and Queen Elizabeth II smiled back at us. It was an unexpected honour.

Feverish excitement took hold and could be felt all over our city as Melbourne hosted the Olympic Games in 1956. Coinciding with that event, television was introduced to Australia enabling the population to watch the events of the Olympics in their own homes. Unimaginable. Every day throughout the games, large

crowds of people milled in front of shop windows that were displaying these new technological wonders, marveling at the black-and-white images

Our friends Benek and Bebka Kaufman were the only ones amongst our friends to own a television set. On the day of the opening ceremony, we all congregated in their flat, which was filled with their friends. What an extraordinary piece of technology it was – a cinema in your own home! A new, life-changing era began. Very soon television transformed our lifestyle. People began staying at home to watch television instead of going out to the pictures. This had a significant impact on the movie industry and many of the numerous suburban cinemas closed their doors. When visiting friends, it was common to watch television with them and conversation was suspended until the program ended. The custom of serving supper was still upheld. Only then was speaking permissible and the programs we had just watched were discussed.

In 1956 there were also fabulous changes in the history of the Goldstein family. In September of that year, Ludek and I were naturalized. The naturalization ceremony took place at the St Kilda Town Hall, where we, together with many other New Australians (as migrants were then called) were presented with a certificate of naturalization. We became Australian citizens! Finally, there was closure and permanence. We became citizens of the best country in the world, the country that had adopted and welcomed us. As if to mark this occasion, we also happened to be expecting our first baby, a first-generation Australian citizen.



Naturalization certificate, 1956

In the meantime, Ludek and I were saving up for a pram by emptying our pockets of three pence and sixpence pieces every day after work and filling a milk bottle with this small change. By the time our little girl Jessica was born, we had collected a bottle full of change, enough to buy her a beautiful pram. She was born in 1957 at the Margaret Coles Maternity Hospital in Prahran, adjacent to the Alfred Hospital. She was a small baby, but she was perfect. We were delighted with her. At the same time, I was overcome by the enormity of the responsibility for this new life that I had brought into the world and I doubted whether I would be up to the task. Would I be able to protect this helpless tiny being from harm?

The atmosphere at the hospital was happy and relaxed. The nurses in their white uniforms and starched white caps were cheerful and friendly. The ward that I shared with three other young women was bright and sunny. Congratulatory flower arrangements that were sent by friends adorned the ward. There was music on the radio and the voice of the newly discovered singer Harry Belafonte was heard singing his calypso songs. We sang along and the nurses joined in while they were making our beds in the morning. Visiting hours were strictly adhered to. Prior to visiting hours, patients were encouraged to get ready for visitors by grooming their hair, putting on some lipstick. It would have been unthinkable not to be wearing a bed jacket over a nightgown during visiting hours. This garment was quite a fashion item and it came in various colours, fabrics and styles.

A one-week stay in hospital was compulsory after confinement. I was looking forward to going home with my baby. I was told that I could go home but that my baby had still not reached her

desired weight. I had to leave her at the hospital. I flatly refused to go anywhere without her and I burst into tears. The nurse tried to calm me by saying that I would lose my milk if I upset myself, but to no avail. I was not going anywhere without my baby. Eventually Matron came to talk to me. She said that there was nothing wrong with the baby, that she was indeed a very beautiful little fairy, that she was fine, but because she was born very small, she had not yet reached her desired weight. She told me that she had consulted the doctor, who suggested that I go to an after-care facility and if I agreed, I could take the baby with me.

Eventually it was decided that I would go to the Queen Elizabeth Baby Care Centre in Carlton, which was also a school for mother-craft nurses. Jessica and I shared a room and the nurses taught me how to change her and bathe her and how to manage the housework while she slept. Those nurses were wonderful, encouraging and thoughtful. They would take the baby out of the room for the night so that I could have a good night's sleep. The nurses would encourage mothers to go out while they looked after the babies. Ludek came to visit every evening after work and one evening the nurse suggested: 'Why don't you take your wife out tonight?' and so Ludek and I went to the pictures. When the time came for me to leave, one of the nurses watched me bathe Jessica and declared, 'You have got what it takes, no worries.' That boosted my confidence somewhat.

Jessica was putting on weight and a week later Ludek picked us up and brought us home. As neither of us had parents, we had to manage. I stopped working and looked after Jessica while Ludek went to work. Jessica was fair and had blue eyes. She was a good

baby and gave us a great deal of pleasure. Inka and Hansi came to visit one day to see the baby, stayed a while, said, 'You will manage,' and left.

I found that the baby health center was a wonderful institution. The mother-craft nurses were most helpful and encouraging and their advice invaluable.

Jessica grew into a delightful, clever and interesting little person with a language all her own and a sense of humour that she inherited from her father. She was very amusing and we enjoyed her company immensely, as did Natka and Stefan, who loved her and sometimes helped with babysitting.

Twenty-two months later, in the summer of 1959, Michelle, our second perfect, beautiful baby daughter was born. She was my very special birthday present, arriving just ten days before my birthday, earlier than expected. She was an intelligent, bright, single-minded little person who always knew what she wanted. She was full of life and always in a hurry for a new challenge. She inherited Ludek's *joie de vivre*.

Ludek and I never imagined that we would survive, let alone be blessed to have children to follow us. We were very fortunate and most grateful that our babies were born in Australia - a peaceful, lucky country.

The year 1959 ended happily with the arrival of Ludek's only surviving relatives, his favourite Uncle, Emil Asznowicz, Aunt Hela, their son Richard with his wife Stefa and their three-year-old son Adam arrived in Australia from Poland. They arrived by boat at Port Melbourne where our little group of four, Natka,



*Guta and Ludek with their little daughters Jessica
and Michelle. 1959*

her husband Stefan, Ludek and I waited impatiently for them to disembark. Natka had not seen her sister Hela since she left Poland after the War. Ludek and his uncle had last seen one another at the start of WWII when Ludek was a boy of thirteen and Richard was nine. That was how his uncle still remembered him.

When his uncle saw Ludek he exclaimed with surprise “Ludek! How you have grown!” All these years he had remembered his favourite thirteen-year-old nephew the way he had seen him last, twenty years prior.

Ludek and his cousin Richard talked all night catching up on their lives.



Jessica and Michelle with their great uncle Emil.

I found Steffa to be an unusually lovely person, gentle, wise and thoughtful. We became fond of one another from the very start.

It was a wonderfully happy reunion and Ludek was overjoyed to have family again.

We were all looking forward to a tranquil future in Australia.

P O S T S C R I P T

Our children grew up to be capable, intelligent and interesting women of whom we are most proud. They are caring and loving daughters and kind and considerate towards others.

In the ensuing years we were happy to be at Michelle and Steven's wedding and were thrilled to celebrate the birth of our eight delightful grandchildren whom we love, and admire. They are gifted, creative and witty. We always enjoy their company immensely.

Ludek and I are particularly thankful that our children and grandchildren had the opportunity to have a good education and that they are able to have the careers of their choice.

They are thoughtful and are a credit to their parents, grandparents and their community.

Sadly, Ludek passed away in 2003. We miss him every day. At his funeral Steven said of him 'He was a rare gift – he harboured no bitterness or malice: he was playful, fun, funny, generous and made the world a better place by just being in it.'

Three of our grandchildren are now married and I am delighted to be the great-grandmother of Odelya and Noah.

They are the future

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